



BLUE AND GRAY

WEEKLY



Stories of Brave Northern and Southern Boys in the Civil War.

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Price 5 Cents.

LEADING THE LINE; OR, THE BOYS IN GRAY'S BEST WORK.

By LIEUT HARRY LEE



Will Prentiss listened with interest to the story of the wounded farmer. His daughter supported his head while he spoke in feeble tones. "The Union Army is moving North to Black Bavou! You are going the wrong way!"

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The Boys in Gray's Best Work.

By **LIEUT. HARRY LEE.**

CHAPTER I.

THE SCOUT'S STORY.

The city of Richmond, Virginia, was in a state of fevered excitement during the month of June, 1862.

The great civil war between the North and the South was reaching a critical stage. The United States army under McClellan was embarked upon that fateful Peninsula campaign, and the troops in blue were at times within twelve miles of the capital city of the Confederacy.

That Richmond was not taken at that time was due to the plucky and skillful defense of the Confederate army under their famous generals, Lee, Longstreet, Hill and Jackson. The great battles fought along the Chickahominy were bloody and sanguine, and yet productive of little real result for either side.

They have gone into history as the Six Days' Battles. Before Richmond McClellan was resisted so stoutly that he retreated to Harrison's Landing, and eventually returned to Washington.

But if the results of the Peninsula campaign were a disappointment to the people of the North, they furnished cheer and encouragement to the people of the South.

With an inferior force Lee had kept the foe from entering Richmond. He had harassed his retreat and inflicted a loss in men upon him which almost staggered the country.

The vacillating and over-cautious policy of McClellan had ended in disaster. In Washington was profound despondency, in Richmond exultation and effervescence of spirits.

And indeed the Confederate defenders had reason to feel elated and proud.

They had met and forced back to its intrenchments the largest, the finest equipped and best trained army of modern times, the pride of the North, the flower of its manhood, the perfection of its military training, the Army of the Potomac.

Fair Oaks had been desperately fought, Mechanicsville and Gaines' Mill, or the battle of the Chickahominy, had seen the Union army in a cautious retreat. On the morning of Saturday, the 28th of June, the magnificent Army of the Potomac began to fall back.

It began to be whispered about that the campaign was a failure. Men in the ranks had lost heart. The commanding officers were depressed.

Instead of the bold dash and grand assault upon the trenches of the foe they had fought on the defensive.

Retreat is part of the tactics of an inferior force which

must change its ground to avoid a trap. But of a superior force, never.

But whatever defection there may have been on this score on the Union side the Confederates were eager to appreciate. It began to look to them as if their cause would be cheaply won after all.

At this time, had it not been for the brilliant victories of Grant and Sherman and others in the West, the cause of the Union would have looked dark indeed.

Our story will deal with the adventures of a youthful militia company in the Confederate service known as the Virginia Grays.

They were all youths of the best families in and about Richmond. Many of them had left their studies in college to fight for the cause of Dixie.

They were captained by a popular young man of Richmond's highest circles called Will Prentiss. He was the son of Colonel Jeff Prentiss, one of President Davis' right hand men.

The Virginia Grays had already won high distinction on the battlefield. The President and the Congress regarded them with the greatest of favor.

In the battle of Gaines' Mill, or the second of the famous Six Days' Battles, the Grays had distinguished themselves. That night they were among the first to learn of the great retreat which McClellan had decided to make.

In the morning General Lee was greatly in doubt as to the course taken by the retreating army. His reconnaissances did not reveal the truth.

It came, however, when Will Prentiss, the brave young captain of the Grays, rode into his presence with the announcement:

"The Union army is in full retreat toward the James River by way of Savage's Station."

At once the order was given for the general pursuit. It was intended to hit the retreating foe as hard a blow as possible.

The Grays, though an independent company, were nominally a part of the regiment of Colonel Joe English. They hastened to join their regiment.

But, before going further, it would be better to turn back and record a few thrilling incidents which occurred some hours previously, and which have a bearing upon the events of that day.

The Grays were in bivouac after the terrible fighting at Gaines' Mill. The boys were so exhausted that they were glad to fling themselves upon the ground and sleep.

But Will Prentiss took only a brief nap. A little after midnight he was astir. He was seated upon a log with pencil and paper in hand writing letters, when one of the sentries came up escorting a rough-looking, uncouth sort of man. The sentry spoke:

"Captain Prentiss, here is a man who claims to be a scout. He has news for you."

Will looked at the fellow sharply. For a moment he thought he detected traces of the rogue about him.

"What is your name," he asked.

"Bill Floyd!"

"Have you papers?"

"Yes."

"Let me see them!"

The pretended scout drew from his pocket a greasy document. He passed it to Will, who read it carefully. It was an endorsement of William Floyd, scout and spy in the service of the Confederacy, and signed by Jefferson Davis.

Will could not dispute the authority of this and at once accepted Floyd to be what he claimed.

"Well, Floyd," he said, "this seems to be regular. Do you know anyone in my company?"

The scout shook his head.

"No, sir," he replied.

"Well, Floyd, what can I do for you?"

"I hev come to bring you word concernin' the Yanks an' what they are goin' to do next!"

Will gave a start.

"Oh!" he said. "Is that true? Why do you come to me? Why don't you go to General Longstreet?"

"Wal," said the fellow, with apparent candor, "you'll take it up, an' jest as likely as not ther general won't. It's very important, for thar's a move on to-night to strike a hard blow at Lee's army to-morrow."

Will was now interested.

"Why don't you think General Longstreet would take it up?"

"Bekase he would think it was too small a matter. But that's not so. It's one of ther most important moves yet made!"

"Well, let us know what it is."

"I've told ye all I know. Ther plan is to be laid to-night. Thar's a traitor in our army, and he will meet two Yankee officers to-night in the white oak grove down hyar by the swamp. It will pay ye to go down thar with me to-night and overhear their talk."

Will whistled softly. This was certainly promising of excitement, and perhaps of some great benefit later on.

"A traitor!" he said, musingly. "Who is he, Floyd?"

The scout licked his dry lips with his tongue and made reply:

"If I speak his name ye mustn't say a word to nobody?"

"I promise it!"

"Wal, his name is Chet Winton. He is a leftenant in the Fourth Georgia. He is a handsome young feller an' smart. But he's a traitor."

Will Prentiss gave a great start.

He knew Lieutenant Winton right well. The Fourth Georgia had done some great fighting in the first day's battle before Richmond, and Winton had won honorable mention.

That he could be a traitor seemed to Will an utter impossibility. Yet, he knew well that such things happened frequently. Many a man supposed to be true as steel had been discovered to be false to his trust.

For some moments the young captain grew cold and hard.

That a man of Winton's standing should turn traitor to his country at this critical period showed him to be a villain undeserving of mercy.

"Can you prove this charge, Floyd?" he asked, sternly.
 "That's what I kin, and I'll do it to-night, if ye'll go with me."

Will was reflective a moment. There was yet a doubt in his mind. He was not ready to believe this charge against his friend and one whom he believed loyal.

"I don't understand why you have brought this matter to me, Floyd?" he asked, suspiciously. "Why did you not take it to General Longstreet?"

Floyd shrugged his shoulders.

"Thet's fer ye to do after ye have the proof," he said. "If I went to General Longstreet he couldn't give it his personal attention. He'd jest send some other officer with me. What's ther difference? In course if you don't want to bother with it I kin go to Longstreet myself."

Will's face cleared.

This was a logical explanation enough, and he said:

"All right, Floyd, I'll accompany you. Are you ready to go now?"

"As ready as ever I could be, sir."

"Very good!"

Will arose and put away his letter. Then he buttoned his military cloak about him. He took the precaution to thrust a pistol into his belt. He buckled on his sword and said:

"All right, Floyd! Is it far?"

"Only a few hundred yards beyond the lines, sir."

Floyd led the way. They passed between the lines of stacked muskets and the rows of sleeping figures in gray. In a few moments they passed the sentry.

A little later they reached the picket and passed him. Will was able to give full explanation to the picket.

Beyond the picket they plunged into darkness. They crossed a field and leaped a rail fence.

Along this they proceeded for a way and suddenly came to the verge of the white oak swamp.

Here Floyd paused a moment and made search for a path. He found it, and now they pushed on into the depths of the swamp.

For fifteen minutes they threaded the devious ways, until suddenly Floyd paused and whispered:

"Do ye see?"

A star of light twinkled deep in the Stygian-like gloom of the place. Toward this they now crept.

In a short while they beheld a startling scene.

In a little clearing in the swamp were two men, dressed in uniforms of blue. They were plainly seen in the light of a lantern hanging from the branch of a tree.

One of them sat on a stump. The other paced up and down uneasily. Will regarded them with interest.

It was plain that they were awaiting an arrival. Who this was Will could only guess. That it was Chet Winton the scout had affirmed.

"See!" he whispered, "they're waitin' for him! He'll be here soon!"

A daring idea occurred to Will.

"Floyd," he said, "they are near our lines, we might make prisoners of them."

"Ye can't do that."

"Why?"

"Look beyond ther lantern light!"

Will did so and gave a start. He saw dimly the figures of half a dozen Union soldiers who were acting as guard for the two officers. All thought of capturing the officers left Will's mind.

He now crouched behind the log with Floyd, awaiting developments. They were not long in coming.

Suddenly there was a rustling sound in the undergrowth back of them. Will gave a start and would have started up. But the scout restrained him.

A figure brushed past them in the gloom. He passed near enough to touch the two crouching men. Yet, apparently, they were not seen.

"Look!" whispered Floyd. "What did I tell ye? Do you see?"

Into the lantern's circle of light strode a tall, slender young officer, dressed in Confederate gray.

A slouch hat concealed the upper part of his face. Yet his drooping mustache, such as Will knew to be Winton's, could be seen.

He saluted the two Union officers and said:

"Gentlemen, I am here and ready for business!"

"The traitor!" whispered Will, restraining himself with difficulty.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE SWAMP.

It was an exciting moment for the boy captain of the Grays. If there was one thing on earth that Will Prentiss despised it was treachery.

That Chet Winton should be a traitor was a most astounding revelation. And yet it was a time when honor seemed to be held cheap and principle was at low ebb.

Men more seemingly loyal than this young lieutenant had sold their country for paltry gold. Will bent forward and listened:

"Lieutenant Winton, we are glad to see you! I want to introduce you to my friend, Colonel Chapin."

"Very glad to know you, colonel," said Winton. "General Bristow has often spoken well of you to me."

"The general is a flatterer," said the Union colonel with a laugh. "But I am pleased to know that you are to become one of us, Winton."

"It is impossible for me to link myself longer with the Southern cause."

Will gripped his hands till the nails sank deep into the flesh.

"The traitor!" he whispered.

"The Union will be glad to receive all like you who wish to return to the old flag. Now, Winton, I am told that you can do me a great service."

"Yes, if you can secure the co-operation of General McClellan."

"We have only to prove to him the feasibility of your plan."

"I can do that easily." At this Winton drew a map from his pocket. "Here is the whole plan of the Confederate advance. In the morning Magruder will hit the right flank of the army in pursuit, Hill will strike the left. If you will cause General McClellan to draw in his right wing to-night and swing around to the north to envelop Hill I will see that Magruder gets a forged despatch from Lee to march back to the Chickahominy. I am in a position to be able to give away every Confederate pawn in this game of chess."

The two Union officers had listened with apparent interest. The one addressed as General Bristow said finally:

"The plan if properly executed will divide Lee's army and disorganize it. We can then cut it to pieces."

"Just so!" declared Winton. "Now, for the successful execution of this move I am to receive——"

"Ten thousand dollars in gold and a captaincy in our army."

"The bargain is made. It shall be done. See McClellan at once and have him draw in his right wing. Leave the rest to me!"

"All right, Lieutenant Winton. We have full confidence in you."

"You may. I will not abuse it."

"Then all is settled?"

"Yes."

Winton shook hands with the two Union officers. Then he stepped into the gloom and vanished.

The two officers picked up their lantern and walked away into the night. The dark plot was made. How it succeeded we shall see.

Will had listened to all spellbound. The desire had been strong upon him to spring out and denounce the traitor. But he refrained from doing so.

He, however, arose and whispered:

"Let us overtake Winton. We might as well confront him now."

"No!" protested Floyd. "Don't ye do it! Thar'll be nothin' to gain an' everything to lose. He's outside our lines now. Wait till he gets in."

"You are right!" agreed the young captain. "That is what we will do."

Through the woods they crept and back to their camp. Will was much excited. He felt that something must be done at once.

Fred Randolph, the young lieutenant of the Grays, was awaiting his return. To him Will told all.

"I am very much surprised," declared Fred. "I can hardly believe that of Winton. He always seemed to be an honorable fellow. It is dreadful! What will Miss May think of it?"

"Miss May?" exclaimed Will.

"Yes. Did you not know that he was engaged to Virginia May, the prettiest girl in Petersburg?"

Will tapped his sword hilt with his fingers. His face grew serious.

"It is too bad!" he said, slowly, "but it is our duty, Fred.

Not even for the sake of Virginia May can we set it aside. Chet Winton must be mad!"

"What do you intend to do?"

"There is only one thing for me to do."

"Report to General Lee?"

"Yes."

For some moments the two young officers were silent. It was to them a matter of no small moment.

Chet Winton belonged to their set in Richmond. Virginia May, his fiancée, was one of the belles of the past social season, and her family one of the best in Virginia.

It would be a terrible blow to her and to the many friends of Lieutenant Winton. It can be therefore easily understood why Will Prentiss should shrink from his task.

But there was no other plan. There was no way to evade the matter. It was a stern necessity.

Just then an orderly appeared and dismounting, saluted:

"Captain Prentiss?"

"Yes!" replied Will.

"General Longstreet would like to see you at once in his tent."

"Tell General Longstreet that I will report at once."

It was evident that the great Confederate leader was wasting no time in sleep. That he should be astir at that early hour was indication of some new move of magnitude.

Will made his way along the trenches and the lines of campfires for nearly a mile until he reached the headquarters of Longstreet.

As he appeared at the tent he saw aides and orderlies flying here and there. An orderly stepped up to him at once.

"Are you Captain Prentiss?"

"I am."

"General Longstreet has given orders that you should at once be admitted."

"I am ready."

Will entered the tent and at once doffed his cap and saluted. At a table sat two men. One was Longstreet himself.

The other Will knew well. The noble bearing, the patriotic features of General Lee were not to be mistaken.

"So this is the boy of whom you were speaking, Longstreet?" asked General Lee, with a pleasant smile. "Why, I know him well! He is Jeff Prentiss' boy."

"Yes," replied Longstreet, "and I can tell you he is a wonder. If he would only accept promotion I could make a brigadier of him right away."

Will was at ease at once and replied:

"Gentlemen, you give me too much credit. I aspire only to do my duty as captain of the Virginia Grays. I do not seek political nor military advancement. I seek only to serve the Confederacy."

General Lee's face grew grave. His eye flashed with a wonderful fire.

"That is a sentiment I admire, Captain Prentiss," he said, warmly. "If there were only more like you in our service we would soon end the war."

"I told you so," said Longstreet, in an undertone. "The boy is all right. Shall we give him instructions, now?"

"Yes."

"Prentiss," said General Longstreet, in a matter-of-fact way, "we are somewhat in the dark as to McClellan's plans just now. But we think he means to beat a retreat. In that case we must, if possible, cut him off and make him fight. We think Jackson will succeed in cutting his communications. If we can corner him I believe we can force him to surrender. Then Washington and victory is ours."

Will listened with interest.

"I hope that we shall have such good fortune," he said.

"All depends upon the rapidity of action. Now we need a small body of men, led by one who is skillful and brave, to lead the line of our advance guard. If the enemy retreats we must pursue. We have thought of you and your Virginia Grays."

Will's eyes flashed.

"I hope you will assign that honor to us," he cried.

"You shall have it," said General Lee. "Now, I believe that at times you mount your company?"

"I have done so."

"Very good! You shall have horses assigned to you this hour. First, make a swift dash out toward Savage's Station and see what you can learn about the movements of the foe. Return, if possible, before daylight and report. Then when we advance you must lead or precede the column."

Will bowed and turned to go. Then like a flash a sudden thought came to him.

"Pardon me, gentlemen," he said, "I came near forgetting an important matter."

"Ah!" said General Longstreet. "What is it, Prentiss?"

"To me it is the most painful duty of my life. But I am compelled to inform you that I have discovered a traitor in our midst!"

"A traitor?"

"Yes."

The two generals started up and their faces grew cold and hard.

"Let us have all particulars, Prentiss," said General Lee. "Speak his name!"

"I hesitate to do so. Yet I must. His name is Chet Winton."

General Longstreet looked inquiringly at Lee. The latter contracted his brows.

"Winton!" he exclaimed. "You don't mean young Winton of the Fourth Georgia?"

"Yes."

General Lee sprang up and his face grew ashen pale. He trembled like a leaf.

"No, no!" he said, "I can't believe that! Chet Winton is a noble young man. Why, he is to marry the daughter of Colonel Jack May! Oh, no! there is a mistake!"

"I am very sorry, General Lee," said Will, firmly, "but it is true."

The great Confederate leader paced up and down the length of the tent. It was some moments before he seemed

to recover from the shock. Then he sat down at the table. His face was pale, but he said firmly:

"It is hard to believe! What is your evidence?"

Will then recounted the story of Floyd's visit and of his story. He gave the details of their visit to the swamp and of overhearing the conspiracy of Winton to lead the Confederate army into destruction.

The two generals listened attentively. When Will had finished, General Lee leaned over the table and said:

"Where is this scout, Floyd?"

"In my tent!"

"Send an orderly for him."

This was done. In less than half an hour Floyd entered the tent.

The scout faced the great generals in a cool and unconcerned way. General Lee questioned him:

"How did you learn that Winton was to meet these Union officers in the swamp?" he asked.

"I was in the Union lines and overheard them talking about it! I at once got through to our lines with the news."

"Why didn't you come to me?" asked General Longstreet.

"I was afraid you'd give the matter to some greenhorn or that ye might send for Winton himself an' question him. That would spile all."

This reasoning, while it seemed of questionable logic, was accepted. But General Lee now asked:

"Let me see your credentials."

Floyd produced them.

"They are regular," said General Lee. "Here is the President's signature. It is too bad. But—" and he arose, while his voice rolled like thunder. "Father, son, or brother, no matter what the tie, no matter what the social position, he who is a traitor to our cause can expect no mercy. He must die!"

CHAPTER III.

UNDER ARREST.

General Longstreet turned to his table and picked up a pen.

"I will this moment write an order for Chet Winton's arrest," he said. "Ah! what is this?"

An orderly entered and saluted:

"General Longstreet!"

"Well?"

"Colonel Maurice Ormsby wants to see you at once. He has an important bit of information for you."

"Very good! Show him in!"

A moment later there strode into the tent a man of peculiar make-up. He was tall and angular, with a peculiar thin and long nose. His eyes were habitually red, and shrewd in expression.

Colonel Ormsby was not a man of prepossessing appearance. His reputation was that of a cold and crafty nature. In Richmond, where he was well-known, he was not popular.

But his wealth and influence had secured him a commission as an officer in the Confederate army. Even with the soldiers of his regiment he was unpopular.

Ormsby glanced at Will and at Floyd, but only nodded in recognition. Then he said:

"Generals Lee and Longstreet, I have come to inform you that there's a traitor in our camp."

"What?" exclaimed both generals in the same voice. "Another traitor! What do you mean?"

Ormsby saluted again.

"My pickets captured a Union spy, and upon his person they found this letter."

Ormsby handed an epistle to Lee. The latter took it and glanced at it. Thus it read:

"To Chet Winton, Lieut. Fourth Georgia:—

"We have all plans laid. You have only to do your part and Lee's army will be a thing of the past within forty-eight hours. Your commission as captain in our army will be ready the moment the work is done. This letter is entrusted to one of our scouts, and I hope it will reach you safely.

BRISTOW, Brigadier General."

General Lee handed the letter to Longstreet. Then he fixed a keen, searching gaze upon Ormsby:

"You are sure there is no mistake, Ormsby? Your picket captured a Union scout and on his person found this letter?"

"That is the truth!"

"Where is the prisoner?"

"I regret to say that as the corporal's guard was bringing him into camp he made a dash into the darkness and escaped."

General Lee was silent a moment. Then he turned to an orderly:

"Go to the camp of the Fourth Georgia. Bring Lieutenant Winton back with you. Let a guard accompany you, but don't let him know why or anything about this. Bring him here!"

There was a momentary silence. Will Prentiss drew a deep breath. Floyd the scout was stoical and noncommittal.

But Ormsby's face was flushed and his eyes glittered. He seemed elated and nervous.

Will now turned and, saluting General Lee, asked:

"Shall I retire, general?"

"No!" replied Lee. "I prefer that you should stay!"

It seemed an age before the orderly returned. With him was Lieutenant Winton.

As the suspected traitor stepped into the tent every eye was upon him. In that moment it was difficult indeed to believe the charge against him.

Chet Winton was fair and handsome, with open, fearless face, and a manner of refinement and manliness hard to associate with the foul charge of traitor.

He saluted the generals and stood a moment in silence. There was not a shadow of suspicion upon his face.

General Lee's face was pale and stony.

"Winton," he said, "you are charged with being a traitor to the Confederacy!"

The young lieutenant started as if dealt a blow with a whip. His face flushed, amazement was depicted in every line of it.

"General Lee!" he exclaimed. Then he paused. A moment later he said: "Is this a jest?"

"I can assure you it is not," replied the stern commander. "The charge is made and seems to be well sustained. What have you to say?"

The young lieutenant's face flushed hotly. He looked at General Lee a moment and then about him at the others.

"Am I dreaming? Is this a reality?" he asked. "Is it all in earnest?"

"I can assure you that it is."

"But—I can't understand it! You can charge me with being a traitor? In what have I been a traitor? It is preposterous! It is a lie!"

With the last assertion his voice rang out sharp and clear. There was that in his manner which seemed to carry conviction of truth.

In that moment Will Prentiss felt like voicing the prisoner's statement. Then the memory of the meeting an hour or two before in the oak swamp came to him.

He felt sick at heart.

General Lee's face never changed. He went on, coldly:

"Dissimulation will not save you, Winton! I am pained that one like you should turn out to be so false!"

"I demand an explanation," cried the young lieutenant.

"If your charge against me is serious you must prove it."

"It is easily proved."

"Do me the justice to let me know your proof."

"Where were you a couple of hours since?"

The prisoner hesitated, as if to ransack his memory. He promptly replied:

"I walked along the line to the end of our division and back."

"Oh! You passed near the white oak swamp then, did you not?"

"Yes, comparatively near."

General Lee's face twitched a little.

"Did you enter the swamp and hold converse with two Union officers?"

"I did not!"

"Do you know Brigadier General Bristow of the Union army?"

"I do not!"

"Did you expect a message of this sort?"

General Lee handed the letter given him by Ormsby to the prisoner. The young lieutenant glanced over it. At first his face was blank, then he turned an ashen pallor.

"General Lee, where did this come from?" he asked.

"It was found on the person of a Union scout captured by one of our pickets."

Winton was silent a moment. He passed a hand across his brow vaguely.

"General Lee," he said, finally, "you don't believe this thing? You cannot think it of me? There is a fatal mis-

take! It is all wrong! I don't understand it, but I swear to you that I am not a traitor, that I am as true to the Confederacy as your own self!"

General Lee's face never relaxed its stern expression. But there seemed to creep into his eyes a look of pained sadness as he said:

"Winton, you are under close arrest. If this thing is not explained by sunset to-night you will be shot at fifty paces!"

Stunned and seemingly unable to comprehend the situation, young Winton was silent for a moment. Then he turned slowly and looked at Ormsby.

Something like a light of comprehension seemed to break across his face, and he exclaimed:

"Ormsby, you are connected with this affair, are you? You know that I am not guilty. Before heaven, I believe it is your cowardly work!"

Winton took a step toward Ormsby, who only shrugged his shoulders coldly. An orderly stepped between them.

"It is your game to try and saddle your crime upon some one else," he said, in a contemptuous way.

"You hound!" gritted Winton, "I know now that it is your work. I will——"

"Hold!" cried Lee, in a voice of thunder. "What is all this?"

"General Lee!" said Winton, "I earnestly believe this fellow is at the bottom of my trouble!"

"Why should he, more than any one else, seek to do you injury?"

"He is my sworn enemy!"

General Lee looked from one to the other. Then he said:

"Orderly, call a guard and take the prisoner away!"

Winton did not speak again. With head uplifted and a proud and lofty mien he was led from the tent.

When he had gone General Lee turned and said:

"Ormsby, is what he says true? Are you enemies?"

"The enmity is all on his side, general," said Ormsby, with attempted candor. "We attended William and Mary College together. He got angry with me because I had better success in winning the graces of a certain young woman."

"Oh!" said General Lee, sharply. "And that young woman was the daughter of Colonel Jack May, was she?"

"Y-yes!" stammered Ormsby.

General Lee smiled in a peculiar way. But he turned and said:

"Captain Prentiss, you have your orders. See that your men are in advance of our columns before sunrise. Report to me when you learn the course of the enemy."

"All right, General Lee," said Will. With a salute he passed out. Floyd the scout accompanied him.

Once they were in the outer air the scout made remark:

"Well, we cornered the fox, didn't we? He put up a good bluff."

"I believe he was sincere," said Will, with conviction.

"Eh?" exclaimed Floyd. "Ye kin say that, arter all ye've seen?"

Will hesitated. He could not deny that he had seen Winton meet the two Union officers in the swamp.

He had heard the conversation. Also he had seen the

communication found on the captured Union spy by Ormsby's picket. It was all very conclusive.

It seemed as if there could be no possible doubt of his guilt. Will endeavored to banish the matter from his mind.

When he got back to his camp he at once recited the whole affair to Fred Randolph. The young lieutenant listened with darkening face.

"It is awful," he said. "I can't believe it of Winton."

"But it is apparently true. I can believe my own eyesight."

"Well, it's too bad! He will surely be shot, and Virginia May——"

"Will be thankful that she escaped the fate of marrying a traitor!"

"I'll tell you one thing."

"What?"

"That Ormsby needn't flatter himself. She'll never marry him."

"Well, I would not blame her for that," agreed Will. "I have a decidedly poor opinion of him."

But orders had been sent to the stables for one hundred horses. Floyd the scout now presented himself to Will.

"Can't I go along with ye?" he asked. "I kin help ye out a little as guide, fer I know ther country well."

"Very well," agreed Will. "Select a horse and fall in."

The Grays were quickly mounted. They galloped away into the darkness. Will kept away to the southward and toward the Chickahominy.

He reached the banks of that stream and crossed at New Bridge. It was not long before the little detachment galloped into the deserted trenches of the retreating Union army.

It was a matter of much surprise that the Union army should thus retreat. It was evident that they were heading for the James River.

Pursuant to an order Will galloped back and made report to General Longstreet. The report spread like wildfire.

The Union army was in full retreat for the James! McClellan dared not stand his ground!

The siege of Richmond was raised, the invading army was being driven off Virginia soil!

The Confederate cause was triumphing! It is not to be wondered at that the spirits of the Southern people were high.

There was great rejoicing in the Confederate capital. The attack on Richmond was a failure!

The Union army, than which no grander had ever been raised, was demoralized and retreating in wild confusion to Washington.

The wildest of speculation followed. The most visionary of dreams ensued. There were many ready to approve of an immediate move upon the Union capital.

"Send Jackson to Washington!" was the cry. "Make one bold dash and all is over!"

But wiser counsel prevailed. President Davis was too farsighted. He knew that the capital was well defended and that such a move would be foolhardy.

But the Confederate army moved forward instantly in pursuit.

By daybreak its columns filled all the roads leading southward. By forced marches Lee hoped to intercept and cut them off.

Longstreet and A. P. Hill crossed the Chickahominy at New Bridge, Magruder took the Williamsburg road, and Huger marched along the Charles City road. Jackson was ordered to cross far below at the Grapevine Bridge, and thus fall on the rear of the enemy.

Everything was well planned. It was expected that one more hard blow would finish the Union army, and then the way to Washington would be open.

Daybreak came, hot and stifling. The Virginia Grays were far in advance of the moving Confederate columns.

They had met with but little resistance so far. Several sharp skirmishes with McClellan's rear guard had served only to locate the enemy, nothing more.

But Will soon became satisfied that he was not gaining all the information necessary concerning McClellan's plans.

He knew that the main army was falling back to the James. But there was good reason to believe that some part of the Union forces had diverged and were rapidly moving north. What this meant the young captain of the Grays could only guess.

But he was determined to learn at the earliest opportunity.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WORK OF GUERRILLAS.

The real move of this division of the Union army could not be guessed by Will Prentiss at the moment.

It was his business to ascertain. He knew well its importance to the Confederate generals. It might involve an unexpected evolution on McClellan's part to deal the Confederates a vital blow.

The rear guard of the Union army was by far too strong for the Grays to cope with.

But they rode as near as they dared to the lines of the foe. Once they narrowly escaped a trap.

Floyd the scout, who rode with Will, and at times volunteered advice, now came in with a surprising report:

"Heintzelman and Sumner, with their men, are counter-marching to the southward and intend to strike the York River Railroad," he said. "There is a small range of hills down there where they intend to make defence, while McClellan draws Lee off to the north."

Floyd was emphatic in his declaration. To Will it looked logical and, if true, it meant a most important change in the programme.

It would mean simply that McClellan, in leading part of his army toward the James, was shrewdly making an attempt to strike Richmond unexpectedly from the south.

The discovery seemed to Will of the utmost importance.

But it was wholly necessary to verify it. So he acted at once with that end in view.

He at once ordered the Grays to "about face," and the little company set out at full gallop southward. They finally left the main highway and struck out through a rolling region toward a series of rocky hills.

So far no sign whatever of the foe was to be seen. The Grays entered a narrow pass which soon brought them out on the other side of the elevation. The waters of a creek were to be seen some ways beyond.

But just at that moment a shrill feminine voice was heard high-pitched and agonized:

"Help! Oh, help!"

Will, in an instant, spurred his horse forward, followed by his troop. They turned an angle in the hill path and came upon an astounding spectacle.

In the narrow roadway lay the figure of a man. His head was supported by a young girl, whose face was pale with anxiety and alarm.

At sight of the Grays she started up with a cry of joy.

"Oh, father!" she cried, "here are friends at last! I see their gray uniforms! Oh, help, captain! Give us help!"

In an instant Will sprung from his saddle and was by her side.

"What is this?" he cried. "How can I serve you, miss? What has happened?"

"Oh, my poor father! He was attacked and beaten by Union guerrillas. I fear he will die——"

"Silence, Esther!" said the wounded man, in a hoarse voice. "Let me see the captain! I have much to tell him."

Others of the Grays had now dismounted and stood by. It was easy to see that the old man was a farmer; nearby was an overturned potato basket. The ground showed signs of a struggle and there were blood patches upon the grass.

"My good man," said Will, bending over him, "you have nothing to fear. We are loyal Confederates. I can see that you are one of us."

The old man's eyes lit up with a wild gleam.

"I am an old 'un," he said, "but I am willin' to die for the Confederacy. That's what brought me here."

"Ah!" said Will. "You have been attacked?"

"Yes; I was on my way down this road to my farm when a troop of Yankee guerrillas sprang out upon me and made a prisoner of me. They demanded that I tell them if any part of Lee's army had yet passed this way. I would tell them nothing and they beat me until I became unconscious. My gal, Esther here, came up and found me. I—I reckon I'm done for—I didn't hev long to live anyway——"

"Oh, father!" cried the girl, wildly, "you shall live! You must not die and leave me!"

"Let me see how badly he is injured, miss," said Will, softly. "If anything can be done for him I will see that it is done."

The young girl, with clasped hands, waited tearfully while Will carefully examined the old farmer's wounds. He was silent after the examination.

It was hard for him to tell the young girl the truth.

The farmer, however, looked up into his face and said, in an undertone:

"I know, captain! It's no use! But before I go I must tell you something of importance. Are you looking fer the Union army?"

"We are," replied Will. "Can you tell us if it has passed this way?"

The old farmer's face showed a spasm of great pain. When he finally recovered, he said:

"Yes, I kin tell ye all!"

He made a sign to his daughter, who at once responded. It was seen that the death color was upon his face.

Will Prentiss listened with interest to the story of the wounded farmer. His daughter supported his head while he spoke, in feeble tones:

"The Union army is moving north to Black Bayou. You are going the wrong way."

He coughed a little and then went on:

"There's a company of guerrillas over yonder, camped by the creek. I hope you will capture them. McClellan is fallin' back toward Malvern Hill. He's marchin' down ther Quaker road. If I was only a young man I'd be shoulderin' a musket for the Confederacy. My time has come. John Brandon must die without seein' the South git her rights. Don't cry, thar, child! I've got to leave ye to the mercy of God!"

His voice broke, and he gasped a moment for breath. The girl rocked and moaned piteously.

"There, there, don't take on so," remonstrated the dying farmer. "My only regret is the thought of leaving you alone in the world. Captain!" he fixed his gaze on Will, "have you a mother? Ye look like a young man of honor. Will ye care for this poor, lone child until she can reach ther home of her aunt on ther Rapidan? I ask ye to grant a dying man's prayer an' swear that ye'll see no harm come to her till then."

"My good man," said Will, earnestly, "compose your mind. You may rest assured that I will do all in my power to protect your daughter till she reaches a place of safety."

"God bless you!" cried the dying man, in husky tones, "I shall die easy! There is truth in yer eyes. Esther, my child, your hand. I give ye my blessing. It's all I have—and——"

A swift change came over his face. Blood showed upon his ashen lips, the eyes went back and became set. Death had claimed him.

The boys uncovered their heads and stood reverently by while the grief-stricken daughter gave vent to her agony of spirit.

The Grays had witnessed many scenes of suffering and death, but they were deeply touched by the sad bereavement of the young girl who was thus left alone in the world.

But time was valuable. The Grays knew the necessity of moving on at once. Will gently took the young girl's arm and assisted her to rise.

"You must be brave and strong," he said. "This is an affliction which visits all."

"You have spoken truly," she said, in a calmer tone. "I

know that no grief of mine must detain you, for you are fighting bravely for our country. Oh, that I were a man and could join you."

"Your father has asked me to offer you protection until you can find your way to the home of your aunt."

"You are kind, sir. I shall be in danger only in this immediate vicinity. I ask only that I may accompany you until I get away from here. I can ride a horse very well. I will give you as little trouble as I can."

"You shall have a horse. But I must ask you if your recent home is nearby?"

"At the base of this hill. The road turns yonder and——" she gave a startled cry. All eyes were turned in the direction of her gaze.

Then the cause of her alarm could be seen and understood. A great cloud of smoke was surging up over the hill.

"They have set fire to the house," she cried. "My soul! All is gone!"

In an instant Will turned and gave the order:

"Mount, Grays! We will catch those scoundrels or know the reason why!"

Then he paused and glanced at the body of the farmer. He lifted his cap and said, respectfully:

"Miss Brandon, what disposition do you wish made of your father's remains? You do not wish them left here?"

She hesitated a moment, and then said:

"If—he could be buried near the home which he built and loved so well—I know it would be his wish."

"It shall be so," said Will. "Corporal Payton, I will detail a guard of four men for you. You will bring the body along to the house and we will there see that it is buried."

A spare horse was led forward and Esther Brandon was assisted to mount. Then the little troop rode away down the path.

In a few minutes they came in view of the burning farm buildings. No sign of the guerrillas was to be seen.

The Grays dashed up to the spot. It was too late to save the doomed buildings. They would soon be a heap of ashes.

But presently Corporal Payton and his guard arrived with the corpse of the dead farmer. As briefly as possible with decency a grave was dug nearby, and the body, wound in a blanket, was reverently lowered and then buried.

One moment Esther Brandon knelt in prayer over the grave, then she sprang up and said:

"I am ready!"

She mounted, and in a few moments the little troop was galloping down to the banks of the creek in pursuit of the guerrillas.

Will was determined to hunt them down if he could, while on his way northward in pursuit of the Union army, which Brandon had asserted had moved in that direction.

This was contrary to the advice of Floyd the scout.

"Thet old chap was mistaken," he declared. "I tell ye that they are south of us yet. McClellan wouldn't go northward now."

Will, however, was determined to accept the story of

Brandon. He knew the Black Bayou was several miles above and an arm of the Chickahominy.

It was more than likely that McClellan was concentrating, rather than dividing his army. Floyd asserted his belief to the contrary, and seemed somewhat angry that Will did not agree with him.

"Ye're makin' a mistake," he declared. "I kin tell ye that McClellan has divided his army and the fust thing ye know Heintzelman and Sumner will countermarch into Richmond."

But Will had made up his mind to strike for Black Bayou. So the Grays rode northward.

Esther Brandon proved to be a splendid horsewoman and easily kept pace with the troop. She rode beside Will, who showed her all possible courtesy.

As the Grays reached the banks of the creek and were about to swing northward over the rough road, they came upon a startling scene.

Over a distant ridge smoke was rising in great volumes. Distant shots were heard.

"That is the farm-house of John Perley," said Esther, with pallid lips. "The guerrillas have descended upon Mr. Perley's place, and it looks as if they had fired it."

Indeed this looked to be a fact. Will pulled up his horse a moment.

"Then there is a dwelling over yonder?" he asked.

"Yes," rejoined Esther. "It is the home of John Perley."

"Enough!" cried the young captain of the Grays. "I will ask you to ride to the rear, Miss Brandon, where you will not be exposed to the bullets."

"I do not fear them," she cried, eagerly. "I beg you to allow me to ride with you."

"If you insist, it shall be as you wish," said Will. "Forward, Grays! Unslung your carbines!"

The little troop dashed forward. In another moment they swung around the brow of a little hill.

A thrilling scene was witnessed.

A house of the good, old fashioned type was in flames. About it was a company of horsemen. They had just mounted and seemed about to ride away.

Will drew his sword, and shouted:

"Ready, Grays! Take aim! Fire!"

The Grays emptied their carbines in one great volley. A number of the guerrillas went down before it.

Will then put spurs to his horse.

"Forward, Grays! Draw sabres! Charge!"

With one wild cheer the Grays dashed forward. Nothing could have resisted the impetuosity of that charge.

They descended upon the guerrilla band like a thunderbolt. There was a terrific hand to hand fight.

Right and left flashed the sabres of the Grays. The guerrillas were borne back and scattered.

Such as were able galloped away in mad retreat. Others were cut down. It was Will's instructions to give no quarter.

They were murderers and thieves and as false to the Union cause as that of the Confederacy. They deserved no trial and merited only death.

CHAPTER V.

REINFORCED IN TIME.

The fight with the guerrillas was soon over. They made but a brief attempt at resistance.

They were scattered like chaff. The dead strewed the ground.

When the fight was over and the bugle recalled the Grays it was found that only two of their number had been killed. Nearly a score of the guerrillas had paid the penalty of their crimes.

The farm-house was fast becoming a heap of ashes.

To a tree nearby there hung the forms of three men, the farmer, Perley, and his two sons.

In the embers were the bodies of the other members of the family. As the Grays with horror viewed this spectacle of the murder of these inoffensive noncombatant people it caused their veins to tingle with indignation.

"Horrible!" exclaimed Fred Randolph. "Too bad that any of the guerrillas escaped us. We ought to exterminate the whole gang."

"That's right!" declared Will, grimly. "If we can ever catch them not one will be spared."

"It is not warfare! It is murder!"

"Yes."

"Why do they kill these poor people, who have done nothing offensive?" asked Esther, with horror depicted upon her face.

"It is the fiendishness of a brutal nature," replied Will. "They claim to be raiders, and their ostensible purpose is to make the country non-supporting for our troops. They hang these people on the flimsy pretense that they are traitors. But their real purpose is personal gain and plunder. Was not your father robbed?"

"Yes," replied the young girl, quickly, "they took his money belt and also many valuable things from the house. Oh, it was awful!"

"I wish I could catch their leader," said Will. "I would hang him with the greatest of grace."

However, time was too valuable to waste here, so the Grays dashed on. It was not long before the swamps which bordered the Black Bayou came into view.

And Esther gave an exclamation.

"Look! You may see that father was right!" she cried. "There are the Union soldiers!"

Will drew rein in the shade of a little grove of trees. From their elevation they could see and not be seen.

Across the bayou there had been stretched a pontoon bridge.

On this were wagons and horses crossing to the other side. It required but a brief inspection for Will to arrive at a thrilling fact.

What Brandon, the farmer, had mistaken for a division of the Union army was an immense supply train!

The discovery of the army itself could not have furnished the Grays with half the joy that this did.

They could not have attacked the army. They could only have made a skirmish and then gone back to report to General Lee.

But here was an opportunity to deal the foe a blow which they would severely feel. To destroy their supplies would be a long step toward forcing their defeat and surrender.

"Great Cæsar!" gasped Fred Randolph, "it's their main supply train, and right in our clutches!"

"It is ours," said Will, triumphantly. "Their guard is not equal to our number."

"No, and they are in no position to resist an attack."

Floyd now rode up. His face wore a sour expression, and he cried:

"Ye're not goin' to attack that train, are ye, captain?"

"Certainly," replied Will. "Do you see any reason why we should not?"

"Yas, I do!"

"What, pray?"

"Wal," said the scout, cunningly, "it's not safe! You kin bet thar's a strong guard back of it. Ther main division can't be far off. Ye'd jest git to work when they'd come down an' wipe ye out!"

"We'll make sure that the coast is clear first," said Will. "We will send scouts over yonder to that high bluff. They can see the whole country from there."

"I advise ye to draw back now, while thar's time."

"Not until I am satisfied that it's necessary," said Will.

"Wal, ye'll be sorry," protested Floyd. "I wash my hands of it."

But Will could not be induced to abandon his purpose, for which he could see no just reason. He sent a reconnoitering party out.

They returned quickly.

It was reported that no large body of troops was near. The coast was clear.

Will now decided to attack the train. He deployed his men so as to come up on all sides of the train in its rear.

The Grays first encountered the rear guard. There was a brief skirmish and they were driven in.

A moment more and there was a panic in the train. Men leaped from the wagons and a scene of wreck and ruin ensued.

The train's guard made but a feeble resistance. In a few moments the Grays had driven them and scattered them like chaff.

Then began the work of destruction.

Will knew that it was out of the question to capture and keep the supplies.

The main body of McClellan's army was but a few miles ahead. They would send down an overwhelming force to effect its recapture.

The only thing to do was to destroy it. So Will caused the horses to be cut loose and stampeded. The wagons on the pontoon bridge were overturned into the bayou.

Those on land, with their contents, were pulled together and set on fire. A scene of utter destruction was quickly in progress.

It seemed hard indeed to destroy so much valuable prop-

erty. But it was one of the rules of warfare. It was to cripple the enemy.

The Grays were compelled to work quickly.

Even as the flames were licking up the heaps of supplies scattering bullets whistled across the bayou and warned them that the foe was coming.

In the distance the advance guard of a large line of infantry was seen coming across the bog.

Their gleaming bayonets flashed in the hot sunlight. Will now quickly gave the order:

"Fall back, Grays!"

The Grays obeyed, and in a short while were once more astride their horses. They paused only to pour a volley into the distant line of the foe.

Then, with a wild cheer, they dashed madly away.

It must have been a disheartening spectacle to the Union soldiers to find their supplies in flames. But the Grays were beyond their reach.

It need hardly be asserted that the little company of Grays felt much elated at their success. They were in the highest of spirits.

Already they were safe from pursuit. They rode rapidly to the northwest and, skirting the bayou, mounted a small eminence, whence a good view of the country could be had.

Here they paused, and Will made use of his glass.

It did not take him long to discover some interesting facts. He saw, far in the north, the blue columns of McClellan's army.

A large portion of the Union forces were making for Savage's Station. Others were pushing toward the distant elevation of Malvern Hill.

"The fate of the Army of the Potomac is sealed," said Fred Randolph. "They will be cut to pieces before they reach the James."

"Do you think so?" said Will.

"I certainly do."

"Well, I hope you are a prophet. But, let me see! Are not those our lines of advance out there?"

"Yes! Longstreet and Hill are in the foreground. See those puffs of smoke? They are pursuing McClellan's rear-guard."

"We are quite a ways in the lead."

"Oh, yes! We must make use of our advantage. We ought to locate another supply train; or, if we could cut off and capture some small detachment, we would be doing something. Hello! What is that?"

A bullet whistled past Will's head. He turned just in time to see a line of figures in blue coming up through the trees below.

"We are attacked!" cried Fred. "We don't need to look for that detachment, Will. It's right here."

It was a question for a moment whether to retreat or to receive the attack. Will tried to estimate the number of the attacking party. But he did not believe that it was large.

So he decided to resist the attack.

The Grays fell back a little over the brow of the hill and sent their horses to the rear. They acted none too soon.

For, up the hillside came the charging line of Union blue. Certainly they manifested great courage.

Up they came with a rush and a cheer. A volley from the Grays staggered them.

But the foe kept coming. Fred Randolph, who had been directing the fire of the Grays, now joined Will.

"I am afraid we are done, Will," he said, with white lips. "They can't be driven. They are too many for us!"

Will Prentiss smiled in a cool way.

"The battle is hardly on yet," he said. "Suspend your judgment for a while. Steady, boys! Hold them back!"

The ringing command caused the Grays to redouble their efforts. But at that moment over the ridge came a reinforced line of the Blues on a wild charge.

The volley fired at them did not stop them. Again the Grays fired.

But the blue line came desperately on. Fifty feet more and the Confederates would be routed. Will saw utter defeat and destruction upon them.

Swinging his sword he urged his men to hold, and they did so desperately. But they would have been scattered the next moment but for an unexpected development.

A wild, ringing cheer went up on the air. Then out of the woods in their rear swarmed uniforms of gray. A great cry went up:

"Reinforcements! Hurrah, hurrah! We are saved!"

With the wildest of rushes the newcomer regiment flew at the Union line. They met with terrific impact, and then followed a desperate and fierce hand-to-hand struggle.

Instinctively Will looked back to see who their rescuers were.

He gave a great start as he saw the colors of the Fourth Georgia. He knew that this was the regiment to which the presumed traitor, Winton, belonged.

He looked to see if, by any possibility, Winton was with them. But he saw nothing of him and knew that he must still be under arrest.

But he saw, in the van of the charge, a slender and daring youth, who wore a lieutenant's straps and who was urging the men on with great energy.

It was he who inspired the Georgia regiment and they responded with a wild cheer.

They overwhelmed the blue line and hurled it back down the slope. The ground captured by them was quickly recovered.

And now, with the enemy in full retreat, the Grays joined their rescuers.

CHAPTER VI.

A BRAVE SOUTHERN GIRL.

The unexpected arrival of the Fourth Georgia was really the salvation of the Virginia Grays.

They would certainly have been overwhelmed in a very short time. But the charge of the Georgia regiment cer-

tainly saved them. The blue line was hurled back over the hill.

They went back in wild retreat to the woods below. No pursuit was attempted, as this would have been unwise.

The Georgia regiment now mingled with the Grays. Captain Foster came up and shook hands with Will.

"We were ordered out on the skirmish line," he said. "We saw you engaged here and thought we would move up this way and give you support."

"You certainly saved us!" cried Will. "But for your opportune arrival we would have been beaten!"

"I am glad if I have been of service. By the way, are you not the officer who furnished testimony against Lieutenant Winton?"

"Yes, and an event which I have always deplored," replied Will, "though my duty demanded it."

"You did perfectly right. But it is hard for me to believe Winton guilty."

"Indeed, so it is for me."

"I hope he can be cleared. But the evidence seemed very conclusive. The saddest thing of all is the fact that he was engaged to the most beautiful young woman in Petersburg."

"Yes," replied Will, "I knew her well. She was Virginia May."

"Exactly," replied Captain Foster. "And I tell you she is a wonderful young woman. Did you see that slender youth who led the last charge?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know you will be surprised. The youth who led that brave dash was no youth at all, but—Virginia May!"

"What?" gasped Will, in amazement. "Virginia May here, and masquerading! It is preposterous!"

"But it is true," affirmed Foster. "In one sense I admire her spirit which prompts her to don a uniform and take her fiancée's place in the ranks. She is brave and skillful. She has registered a vow to clear her lover of the charge against him. I hope she will succeed."

"So do I," said Will, absent-mindedly. "But, I say, Captain Foster, can there be any hope for Winton?"

The captain of the Fourth Georgia shook his head slowly: "I think he is done," he replied. "I see no chance for him. General Lee is very rigid in matters of that sort. He has no mercy for a traitor."

"Do you know this Captain Ormsby whom Winton charges as responsible for the whole thing?"

"Only slightly! I do not know enough about him to form an opinion of his worth."

"I have met him only once. Yet from that fleeting impression I am inclined to believe him a scoundrel!"

"In any case, I am sorry for both Winton and his fair fiancée."

"Do you feel that you are doing right in allowing her to play so masculine a part in your company? Are female officers accepted in the service?"

"I believe they may be, at discretion, though it seems a hoydenish prank on her part. Yet I assure you she is very sincere. I could not refuse her earnest appeal to take her lover's place."

"But—the donning of a man's uniform is hardly in good taste——"

"You are mistaken! Her uniform is only semi-masculine. She still wears a woman's stout skirt and riding boots. Her jacket and cap alone are of the regulation pattern. Moreover, she can handle a sabre like an expert. She learned swordsmanship in Italy."

Will was much interested. He would have asked the honor of an introduction to this remarkable young woman, but at that moment his bugler sounded the alarm.

It was seen that, heavily reinforced, the Union line was returning.

As it seemed folly to meet such superior numbers, it was decided to fall back.

The Fourth Georgia proceeded to do this in good order.

The Grays at once took to the saddle. They galloped away down the other side of the ridge and so evaded another conflict with the Union troops.

It was plain that McClellan's rearguard was a powerful combination. They could not be ridden over by any ordinary cavalry charge.

Will now galloped along the line of the Union rearguard. He ventured no attack anywhere, but he thoroughly reconnoitered the position.

The boy captain was satisfied that it would be no difficult matter to turn either flank of the Union army.

When the Grays reached that part of the line in front of Longstreet's corps, Will at once went up to the general's tent to make a report.

He found that there were many there before him, and he was obliged to wait some time. But finally an orderly appeared and beckoned to him.

In a few moments he was in the tent which had been temporarily pitched at this point while Longstreet was waiting for orders from Lee.

The great general arose and gripped hands warmly with Will.

"Captain Prentiss, I am glad to see you," he said. "I have been expecting an early report from you, and I see that I am not to be disappointed."

"I have carried out your orders so far as I have been able," said Will. "I have ridden south beyond the lower roads to Richmond, and I can report no sign of an attempt to move in that direction. We encountered and defeated a band of guerrillas. Moving north along the Union rearguard we had a few hot skirmishes. In one of these we would have been overwhelmed but for the opportune arrival of the Fourth Georgia."

"The Fourth Georgia!" said Longstreet, with a start. "That is Winton's regiment?"

"Yes."

"I understand they are distinguishing themselves. I hear that the young woman to whom Winton is engaged has taken his place with the full consent of all the members of his company, with whom she seems to be very popular."

"It is true, sir, to my personal knowledge."

"Ahem! I hardly know what to say to that. It seems hardly the thing to trust the lives of a brave company of

men in the hands of a frail, inexperienced woman. It is hardly the place for one of her sex."

"General Longstreet," said Will, earnestly, "the women of the South are fulfilling as great a part in this war as the men. To them we owe much. My own sister is serving as a spy, and has rendered good work, as you know."

"That is true!"

"It is said that Miss May is an expert with the sword. While in hand-to-hand combat she would not stand a great show, yet she led the charge to-day, and her example was so inspiring to the soldiers of the Fourth Georgia that they swept the Union soldiers off their feet. She has a powerful influence over them and they idolize her."

"Very well!" said General Longstreet. "I shall not insist upon her removal. She shall remain at the option of the members of that company. Now, as near as you can learn, McClellan is making for the James River?"

"Yes."

"You suspect no strategical game to attack Richmond along the line of the York River Railroad?"

"It is not possible. The main army is falling back toward Malvern Hill. Part of it is, to be sure, making a stand at Savage's Station. I believe McClellan is seeking to retreat to Washington."

General Longstreet smiled broadly.

"He must never get there," he said. "We must cut him off and disorganize his army. Ah, my boy, I believe our cause is almost won!"

"I hope so, and that the South will be able to maintain her own institutions in her own way."

"I think it will come to pass," said Longstreet. "Now, my boy, I want you to continue to lead our skirmish line. Keep as close to their heels as you can. I think they will have to stand and give battle before another day. If they do we will whip them!"

The general spoke confidently. Will felt that he was right, and his spirits rose greatly. He saluted, and said:

"General, I will carry out your orders as well as I can."

He was about to turn and take his leave, when an orderly appeared, and said:

"General Longstreet, a lady to see you!"

"A lady!" exclaimed the general, in surprise. Then a sudden comprehension came to him.

"Oh, yes!" he rejoined, "I think I understand. Show her in, orderly. I would like you to remain, Prentiss."

Will bowed and stepped aside. The next moment there walked into the tent the heroine of that great charge of the Fourth Georgia. With head held high, her shapely figure erect, she saluted.

"General Longstreet," she said, in a firm, clear voice, "I bring you a report from Captain Foster of our company. He also asks for instructions, which he says you are to give him."

General Longstreet looked straight at the beautiful young daughter of the Confederacy, and his face softened. He knew the spirit of his people so well, he knew what a heroic motive had induced this beautiful young woman to take her present course, that it was not in his heart to condemn

her for this manifestation of an ardent Southern temperament, the like of which was to be found nowhere else in the world.

But he answered, courteously:

"Has Captain Foster a dearth of messengers that he must send one of your sex upon an errand of this sort?"

"I am Captain Foster's lieutenant," she said, with a slight heightening of color.

"Indeed! I cannot believe the South has reached the dire extremity of calling her female population to her defence."

"I am serving as a volunteer," she replied, firmly. "But the serving of my country is not my only motive. I have accepted this commission for the purpose of righting a great wrong."

"Now you interest me," said General Longstreet, with kindling gaze. "Would you mind telling me what the great wrong is?"

"I will tell you with pleasure," she replied, with flashing eyes. "A faithful soldier of the Confederacy, an honorable man and true, stands charged with a foul crime. It is my purpose to maintain his rights and prove him innocent and bring the guilty traducer to justice!"

Unconsciously Will removed his cap and bowed. General Longstreet leaned over his table, and his face grew pale and stern.

CHAPTER VII.

CHASING THE REARGUARD.

"Miss May," said the great Confederate, slowly, "have you any proof to offer of this man's innocence?"

"His own high character, his career of honor, his birth, his family! Why, ten thousand other things should go to prove him innocent!"

The general shook his head slowly.

"That is not a practical view," he said. "I know what actuates you full well. You love this young man?"

She looked full at her questioner.

"I do," she replied.

"I knew it," he said. "Don't you know that love is blind? The evidence against this young man is incontrovertible. He is not the first man to stumble in the path of honor——"

"Never!" she cried, forcibly. "You shall not accuse Chet Winton of such a foul crime! Listen! It is all a dark conspiracy and I know the author of it well! He is a foe and rival of Chet's! His name is Ormsby! Colonel Maurice Ormsby! He sought my hand in marriage. I declined him. He swore revenge, and this is his way of winning it. Oh, believe me, General Longstreet, this is the truth! Chet Winton is no traitor! He is the victim of a foul plot! Do not let them execute an innocent man! Save him! Oh, I beg of you, use your power and your influence to help me save him!"

All the woman of her nature now showed itself in this appeal of Virginia May. Her eyes streamed with tears, her voice was broken and her manner abject and pleading.

Her semi-military garb, her handsome sword, the military bearing, was all lost sight of now in her distress of heart, her wild appeal for the man she loved.

General Longstreet, brave and practical soldier that he was, could no longer remain unmoved.

He stepped forward and held out his hands.

"There, my child," he said, with utmost sympathy, "do not give way to despair. Be brave and hopeful. Do not forget that you are a Southern girl."

Virginia's figure straightened and her manner changed like magic. She drew herself up and said:

"You will forgive my weakness, general, I quite forgot myself. But—it is very hard."

"I know," said General Longstreet, in a quiet voice. "I understand your feelings well. While as a military man I cannot approve of your sex taking up arms, yet I appreciate the motive in your case and I am heartily in sympathy with you. To-night, when the army rests, a drumhead courtmartial will be accorded the prisoner. All evidence will be duly considered. You may appear and plead for him there, and rest assured you shall have all justice done you. If there is an atom of evidence in his favor he shall have the benefit of it. More I cannot promise, for it is not in my power. You know that these are trying times, and the man who plays his country false can hope for little of mercy."

"God will aid me," said the young girl, fervently. "He will not disregard my prayers. I will be present at that courtmartial, with your permission, and I will convince you that Chet Winton is not and could not be a traitor to his country."

General Longstreet bowed, and then said:

"We will, therefore, put the subject aside. Lieutenant May, as it seems I am to know you, I authorize you to give Captain Foster these instructions: Keep his company on the skirmish line for the rest of the day. Follow the enemy's rearguard and drive it when you can. That is all."

The young woman saluted. She looked brave and smart in her semi-uniform of gray. She withdrew from the tent.

For a moment there was silence. General Longstreet was the first to break it.

"If Winton's neck was not in such danger, I would say that he is the luckiest man in the world."

"I agree with you, general."

"There is a type of womanhood to be found rarely anywhere but in the South. She has the spirit to die for those she loves. She will not meekly submit to be trampled upon. I admire that spirit, but I fear she is deceived."

"General," said Will, "do you really think Winton guilty?"

"Yes."

Will started as if shot. The conclusive reply of Longstreet staggered him. He involuntarily exclaimed:

"My soul! he is lost!"

"Only one thing will save him."

"What?"

"The possibility of a pardon. It rests entirely with the President."

"Then you attach no significance to this intimation that Ormsby may have conspired to throw guilt upon him?"

Longstreet looked at Will sharply.

"That is an odd question for you to ask," he said. "You with your own eyes saw him meet the Union emissaries!"

"That is so!" agreed Will, staggered by the reflection. "Really—I—I feel so bad for the young woman that—if I was President Davis I would pardon him and be satisfied with a disgraceful dismissal from the army."

"President Davis must decide that," said General Longstreet. "It all rests with him. Now, Prentiss, you know what is expected of you. Return to your company at once. Harass the foe all you can. Lead the line of advance whenever you see a chance. Hit a blow and get away. Do you see?"

"Yes, general! I hope to make a better report before night."

"Very good! I wish you good luck."

Will now took his leave. He sprang upon his horse and rode back to the spot where the Grays awaited him.

They were glad indeed to see him. Fred Randolph came up.

"What is the word, captain?"

"Advance!" cried Will. "We must lead the line of advance. Forward, Grays, and let us show them what we can do!"

The Grays cheered and now rode forward. Will looked about for some sign of Esther Brandon.

But Fred said:

"I have sent her under guard to her aunt's home on the Rapidan. I have no doubt she will arrive there safely. She left a message of gratefulness for you."

Will was much pleased. He never saw Esther again, but he had the full consciousness of having done his duty.

"I have another bit of news," said Fred.

"Ah! What is it?"

"Floyd has left us!"

Will whistled softly.

"Well, I am not sorry," he said. "Do you know, I have no confidence in that fellow. I don't believe in him."

"Nor I," said Fred. "He may be a good man in his profession, but personally I don't like him."

"That is just my feeling."

Distant sounds of firing gave evidence that a hot action with the Union rearguard was taking place some distance to the south. Will decided at once to proceed thither.

He gave the order and the Grays galloped away with their young captain and his lieutenant in the lead.

As they rode on, Will told Fred about the meeting of Miss May with Longstreet. The young lieutenant listened with great interest.

"It's too bad for Virginia," he said. "She is surely deceived in Winton. It is hard to believe it of him, yet it is undoubtedly true."

"I can't understand how Winton could do such a thing," said Will.

Will now took a westerly course toward Richmond. It was not long before he turned again to the south.

And now he saw the plains of Fair Oaks in the distance. He thought he could detect a wagon train making its way toward the railroad.

With the hope that it might be a Union supply train, he rode toward it. But, as they drew near, Will saw that a blue column was countermarching in a sunken road or lane.

He reined in his horse and took in the situation with keen gaze.

"What do you think of it, captain?" asked Fred Randolph. "Is it a part of McClellan's rearguard?"

"No," replied Will, with decision. "On my word, Fred, we are in luck."

"How is that?"

"Yonder is a full regiment and they have strayed from the main army or have been left behind for some reason. It looks to me as if they had lost their way."

"Do you believe it?"

"I do!"

"But—how do we know that they are not part of a larger force beyond the woods there?"

"Pshaw! that is not likely. Look yonder! What do you see over there against the skyline?"

Fred gave an exclamation.

"The guidon of one of our corps!"

"Just so. These men are really at this moment within our lines."

"By Jingo, you are right, Will! They are really entrapped!"

"They are if we act quickly. If they get across the creek over there and reach the railroad, they will be in reach of the Union right, and they will escape."

It was a moment of interest and excitement. It was apparent that the Union soldiers did not know of the proximity of the Grays.

For some moments Will Prentiss revolved a daring plan in his mind for the capture of the Union regiment.

He knew that he could not attack them successfully, for they outnumbered him ten to one.

But Will decided upon a daring plan of action. He selected two of his best men.

"You are to ride at full speed to the nearest corps of our army," said Will. "Tell the commanding officer to at once send a full regiment down here to reinforce us. They must come at once."

Away dashed the two couriers. Then Will turned and gave orders:

"Forward, Grays! Right wheel! Gallop!"

Away went the little company back over the ridge. They were now hidden from the view of the Union regiment.

Will bent down over his saddle pommel and rode hard. The little troop swept on like the wind.

A half mile below they struck the branch of the Williamsburg road. Into this they turned and reached the creek.

The bridge, in common with many others, had been burned.

But the water was not so deep but that they could make a ford.

So into the current they rode. Soon they were on the other side.

A little ways beyond they turned north up a lane. They rode on through the oak growth for half a mile.

Then a halt was called, and Will hastily deployed his men. He was now between the Union regiment and the railroad track, and meant to contest the crossing of the creek.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE GRAYS' BEST WORK.

The tactics employed by Will Prentiss were daring, but correct under the circumstances.

Usually such an attempt to cut out a regiment from a hostile army with such an inferior force would have been the height of folly.

But Will reasoned that the rearguard of the Union army was far beyond the railroad. It would hardly turn back to succor the entrapped regiment.

To hold the ford of the creek against the odds of one hundred men against a thousand was the problem. But, as Will reckoned, the Union colonel would never know how strong the enemy was in front of him.

The reinforcements Will had sent for would arrive naturally on the left flank of the Union regiment. It ought to result in rolling the line up and forcing them to surrender.

The young captain therefore hoped to make a grand coup. How he succeeded we shall see.

The Grays deployed rapidly along the bank of the creek. It was necessary to make a thin line.

But Will knew that the longer the line the more show of force would be made. It would be easy enough to concentrate if they were driven back.

As the Grays crept up in the bottomland and saw the sheen of the water of the creek, the flash of bayonets was seen on the opposite shore.

"Steady, boys!" was Will Prentiss' command. "Take careful aim! Make every shot count! Open fire!"

He walked along back of the line giving these orders. They were quickly obeyed.

The Grays opened a rapid fire. It was plain that the Union colonel was surprised as well as alarmed.

The regiment fell back and quickly deployed. A small field piece was run forward and fire opened with it.

But the line of the Grays was so thin that the shells passed over or through and did little damage. The musketry fire now became hot.

Will speedily found, as the blue line advanced, that he could hardly hope to hold his position.

He was compelled to slowly fall back. But for this he did not care.

He had thought of being able to force the surrender of

the Union regiment without aid. He only hoped to hold it until reinforcements came.

Here and there his brave boys were cut off by the hot fire of the foe. Already half a dozen of them were killed.

Anxiously, as the engagement progressed, Will listened for the sounds of a rear attack. But, as time went on and they did not come, he grew nervous.

He had been forced so far back from the creek that the Union troops were about to ford. If they should cross and make a charge, all would be over.

For Will knew the thin line of the Grays could not hold for a moment.

He began now to see what a tremendous risk he had taken. The outlook was indeed bad.

Every moment increased the peril. Why did not the reinforcements come? As near as Will could reckon the nearest Confederate corps was Magruder's.

He knew that General Magruder would not hesitate to respond. He could not believe that his messengers had met with capture on the way.

The fire now was getting hot.

The Union line was almost across the creek and pressing on. Bullets clipped the branches from the trees, lashed the bark into ribbons and sang weird melodies in their course.

Fred approached Will, and said:

"It looks bad, captain!"

"Yes," agreed Will. "I wish we were well out of it. Why the deuce are we not reinforced?"

"Perhaps our couriers did not get there?"

"Well, I thought of that. Perhaps we had better send others. Hello! What is that?"

A soldier came rushing in from the rear.

"Oh, Captain Prentiss," he cried, "we have sighted a line of blue coming down the railroad track! They are fully two thousand strong!"

Will gasped in horror.

"We are lost," he gritted. Then, with fierce determination, he cried: "No! we can bring up our horses and make a dash to the south out of the jaws of the trap."

"Oh, but the Union regiment has converged in that direction."

"Then we will go the other way!"

"The advancing force on the railroad has thrown out a wing in that direction."

"By Jingo! Then we are surrounded," cried Fred Randolph. "It is fight or die, Will."

"Fight or die!" cried the boy captain. "Let that be our watchword. Bring up the horses! We will mount and cut our way through!"

The order would have been obeyed in that moment, but a great cry went up from the right end of the line:

"Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Down through the oaks came the two messengers sent by Will to General Magruder. With them was an orderly.

One of the boys had his uniform shot into ribbons, another had his head tied up with bloody bandages.

The orderly dropped from his horse.

"Captain Prentiss?"

"Yes!" replied Will.

"General Magruder sends his compliments and begs you to hold off to the last. Colonel Peterson and two regiments are now coming to strike the enemy in the rear!"

Will gasped, and leaned against a tree from weakness. He drew a hand across his clammy brow.

"Thank heaven!" he cried. "It is at the last moment! We will do our best."

The Grays were so much encouraged now that they rallied and kept up the fight.

The Union line was pressing forward with the evident purpose of crushing the Grays as quickly as possible.

Scouts in the rear reported that the Union line from that direction was coming rapidly on to surround the little company of Grays.

Caught as they were between these two heavy bodies of the enemy, the position of the Grays was certainly most desperate.

Will walked up and down the line, speaking words of cheer. At last, when it seemed as if they must give way, a distant volley of musketry and wild cheers were heard. The fire slackened in front. The Union line was seen to become confused.

Nothing will so demoralize a regiment or even an army as a rear attack. So long as the foe are in front, there may be no shrinking from duty. But the thought that a foe is in one's rear is not pleasant to contemplate.

Will Prentiss swung his cap and cried:

"We have won, boys! Bring up the horses at once! Mount, all!"

With a cheer the Grays began to fall back and concentrate. The Union regiment had been ready to charge, but now they were compelled to partly change face.

The Grays mounted in an instant. The order ran along the line. Will Prentiss swung his sword, and spurred his horse in front.

"Forward, Grays!" he shouted.

Northward along the enemy's front they galloped. The attack in their rear was growing in volume, and they were now compelled to change front. It was just the opportunity for the work of cavalry.

Not until the Grays had swung around the end of the Union regimental line did Will give the word. Then, rising in his stirrups, he shouted:

"Forward, Grays! Draw sabres! Charge!"

Like a thunderbolt the little company fell upon the flank of the Union regiment. They rode down through and scattered the line.

Magruder's regiments came down the creek and enveloped the foe. In less than twenty minutes it was all over.

Nine hundred men and officers surrendered unconditionally. Over one hundred lay dead among the scrub oaks.

The loss of the Grays had been fourteen. But the little company's spirit was as indomitable as ever.

Colonel Peterson met Will just after the surrender.

"Oh, Captain Prentiss!" he cried, "I feel as if the honor

of this victory belongs wholly to you! I think you ought to be the one to take the Union officer's sword."

"That is of no consequence, colonel," replied Will. "But for your prompt work in coming to our aid we would none of us be here now."

"You would have surrendered, then?"

"No, we would have died fighting to the last!"

But the danger was not yet over by any means. Up the York River Railroad a brigade of Union soldiers was rapidly advancing.

Owing to some miscarrying of orders numerous detachments of McClellan's army did not join the retreating columns. These were among the number.

But Peterson had two full regiments and the Grays with him. So he was not disposed to fear this new foe.

"Let them come," he cried, "we can choose our position and give them a good fight! We will send these prisoners to the rear."

Really, as Colonel Peterson had said, full credit for the capture of the nine hundred Union soldiers belonged to the Grays.

But for their plucky work in holding them they would assuredly have escaped. The Grays had thus far certainly done their best work of the war in leading the line for General Longstreet.

It soon became evident that the new force of Union soldiers meant to give battle, for their skirmishers were coming through the woods.

Colonel Peterson quickly deployed his men, and soon bullets were whistling among the trees.

Will Prentiss and his Grays went to the rear to wait for the right moment to make a flanking charge.

But just at that moment, when it seemed as if a large engagement was promised, for some reason or other, the Union regiments began to fall back.

Colonel Peterson would have instantly followed, but an orderly dashed up and handed him a dispatch.

He read it with an expression of disgust and disappointment on his face. Will came forward.

"Anything wrong, colonel?" he asked.

"Yes; see for yourself," said Peterson, giving him the dispatch.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER THE BATTLE.

Will took the dispatch and quickly read it. He shared the disappointment of the colonel. Thus it read:

"To Colonel James Peterson:—Upon receipt of this fall back immediately from the line of the York River Railroad. Advance no further on that line.

"Signed: MAGRUDER, Gen'l Commanding."

"Too bad!" said Will.

"Well, I should say so," growled Peterson. "I'd rather

fight this engagement than any other of the whole war. We could whip that force, for we have the best position."

But it is a stern rule that orders of a superior officer must be obeyed, and without question.

Colonel Peterson was too good an officer to disobey. He did not discover until later that it was well that he did not.

At once the Confederate regiments fell back. They reached the creek and crossed it, Will and his Grays acting as a rearguard.

But, to the surprise of all, the foe did not pursue. They remained where they were.

Beyond the creek Peterson fell back to higher ground. Here he was able to get a view of the late battleground.

And an astounding discovery was the result.

South of the railroad a long Union column of several thousand men was deploying rapidly across the fields. It was a thrilling spectacle. Their left wing extended far across the creek.

Peterson's nerves tingled.

"By Jupiter! Do you see that, Prentiss? If we had remained where we were and made battle with the foe, we would have been completely enveloped by this new and tremendous force. They would have hit our flank and rear, and we would have been compelled to surrender."

Will was aghast.

"It pays to obey orders," he said.

"I should say so! That is the worst trap anybody ever escaped."

Certainly the Grays and Peterson's men had reason for self-congratulation. They had been saved by the master hand of their general.

The Union prisoners were now far on their way to the rear of the Confederate line. Escape for them was impossible.

The Union forces, fully five thousand strong, marched up the railroad. Here they came to a halt.

Down the Charles City highway a full corps of Magruder's men were marching. There was nothing left for the Union regiments but to fall back beyond the railroad.

They were soon in full retreat down this road. They did not know that Confederate cavalry was already riding hard to the southward to cut them off.

But the part taken by Will Prentiss and his Grays in the evolution was at an end.

As it is our purpose to follow their adventures, we will leave this part of the field with them.

Will shook hands warmly with Colonel Peterson.

"I thank you warmly for coming to our aid, colonel," he said. "But for you we would not be here!"

"But for you we would not have got those nine hundred

prisoners," said the colonel, warmly. "I wish you the best of luck, and hope to see you again."

"The wish is mutual."

But Will Prentiss and the brave colonel never met again.

In an engagement later in the day Peterson was shot dead from his horse. A noble and brave officer passed away in that moment.

The Grays now galloped rapidly northward along the rear of the Union line. Will had accomplished all that he could along the enemy's right flank. He was now disposed to try the other.

For several miles they rode on, passing advance guards of their own army and at times narrowly escaping a conflict with the rear guard of McClellan's army.

The day was rapidly waning. The Union army had fallen back a number of miles, and it might be said that the nature of the country and dilatory tactics had prevented the Confederates from overtaking them and giving battle.

In their confused condition, with all the roads packed with supply trains, a resolute attack in full must have forced McClellan to turn at bay.

The result would have been hard to foretell. It was likely, however, that, with Jackson coming up in their rear, the Army of the Potomac would have met with dire disaster.

But, as history tells it, they retired slowly and sullenly, protecting their rear and flanks in a skillful and masterly manner.

If their commanding officers had failed in efforts to advance, they certainly manifested a masterly ability to make a successful retreat. And this is said to be the most difficult thing in the art of war.

When nightfall came the Union army had retired from its works at Fair Oaks. Sumner and Heintzelman were at Savage's Station, McClellan's right was far south of the Chickahominy, and his whole line was eight miles long.

Malvern Hill was but a short distance away. There they would have the co-operation of the gunboats in the James River.

It is a matter of history how the skilled Confederate commanders planned to pierce the Union line with the forces of Magruder and Huger.

Jackson was coming down from the north to aid in this attempt. It seemed as if it would sound the death knell of the great army. Jefferson Davis came up from Richmond to see the death-blow given.

That night of Saturday, the 28th of June, will not soon be forgotten by those who were present on that part of Virginia soil.

All along the line of march of the great retreating army were evidences of its demoralized condition.

The weather was hot, and the road was strewn with overcoats and blankets, knapsacks, and other military stores. It was a scene of wreck and confusion most unparalleled.

In the ditches lay the festering corpses of dead soldiers. Under the bushes were wounded men, piteously begging aid from the passerby.

All was dust and heat, death and disaster. Even the elated and pursuing Confederates were moved to pity.

But, with the fall of night, both armies bivouacked. As if by common consent all hostilities were suspended.

The pickets of the rear guard of the Union army were within a few yards of the pickets of the advance guard of the Confederates.

Yet no shots were fired. It was accepted that no resumption of hostilities should be made until daylight.

If the fleeing army was exhausted and shattered, the pursuing army was equally so.

Therefore it was common consent that enabled the two great armies to lie thus within touching distance through the dark hours of the night.

But on the extreme wings much scouting and guerrilla fighting took place. All night this sort of thing was kept up.

The Grays, at nightfall, reported to General Longstreet, and went into bivouac on his front.

Will Prentiss reported to the general, who greeted him warmly.

"Prentiss," said the general, earnestly, "you must not lose sight of one great fact; every general in this army knows of the work done by you and the Virginia Grays this day. It is the best work you have done. In leading our line of pursuit you have accomplished great things. The capture of that Union regiment was skillful and opportune. That is all I can say now."

"You have given us credit for far more than we deserve," said Will. "I thank you, General Longstreet."

"By the way, Prentiss!"

"Well, general?"

"At half-past eight, general Lee and his staff will come here to sit in the courtmartial proceedings against Winton. Considering his standing it has been decided to give him a fair trial."

"I am glad that decision was reached, general. While he is undoubtedly guilty——"

"I am not so sure of that!"

"What?"

"In spite of all my duties to-day I have been able to

resurrect some facts which may have weight. We shall see later!"

Will's face lit up.

"Oh, General Longstreet! If it could only be possible! For the sake of that loyal young woman——"

"I know, my boy! General Lee wants to see stern justice done. But if there is the slightest doubt he will see that the prisoner has the benefit of it."

"I know General Lee to be fair and just. My prayers are with the innocent."

With wildly beating heart Will stepped out into the warm night air. If he only could believe that Winton was an innocent man!

Will left General Longstreet's tent and passed along the front of a brigade which had just thrown up intrenchments along the line.

A large, wide-spreading oak intersected an angle of the works. Just beyond a sentry was pacing.

Most of the soldiers were out of the trenches and engaged in getting their evening meal by the blaze of campfires.

As Will passed along the line of the intrenchments he saw a figure cross the radius of light from a campfire. It was a woman's figure.

She wore a military jacket and cap. Her skirt was a trifle short, yet of modest length. A handsome sword hung from her belt.

Will gave a start as he recognized the fair young lieutenant of the Fourth Georgia, Virginia May. She was coming straight toward him.

Will halted, thinking he would wait her approach and speak with her. She crossed the trench and came along now in a direct line.

But it was necessary for her to pass the shadow cast by the great tree. Will now beheld an astounding sight.

As she reached the edge of the shadow he saw her suddenly start back and her hand fell upon her sword-hilt.

From beneath the tree a man had stepped. He stood before her, and, in spite of the dim light, Will recognized him as Colonel Ormsby.

For an instant they faced each other, then Will heard the firm intoned voice of the young girl ring out:

"What does this mean? What do you ask of me?"

CHAPTER X.

A HARD POSITION.

What seemed like a hoarse chuckle escaped the lips of Ormsby:

"What do I ask of you? All that is dear in life to me! That which you can give me if you choose and which will make of me the happiest man on this broad earth."

"Colonel Ormsby, I request you to insult me no further."

"Miss May, Virginia! For the love of heaven, listen to me!"

"Stand from my path!"

"I will not, until you give me your answer."

Every word came plainly to Will's ear. He walked slowly nearer, unseen by either.

"I gave you my final answer long ago. Stand aside and allow me to pass."

"Your answer was logical under the circumstances that existed then. But now—you may know that other circumstances might induce you to revise it. When you know that a human life hangs upon your will——"

"What do you mean?"

She was breathing excitedly now and drew a step nearer. He nodded and folded his arms.

"I thought you would come to reason," he said. "First, let me say that I know that you love Lieutenant Chet Winton."

"I do," she replied.

"Then you will make any sacrifice to save his life?"

"I will!" she said, tensely.

"Good! I feel that you will. His life is in my hands. If I choose to say the word, he lives. If I fail to say it, he will die a traitor's death!"

She drew a deep breath. Will could almost see the expression of her face as she sought to wrestle successfully with the reptile before her.

"If you can do all that," she said, "win my esteem and the good opinion of everyone by speaking that word and saving an innocent man!"

"I must have more!"

"What?"

"You!"

She recoiled as if from the lunge of a venomous snake. Will's hands clenched until the nails sank deep in his palms. It was a tense moment.

"Do you mean that if I do not consent to marry you that you will refuse to speak the words that will save an innocent man from death?"

"I mean that!"

"Then you are a murderer and a brute! Honor nor truth does not lie in your being! Sooner than accede to such a request, I would see him die, and die with him!"

Her voice rang out, hard and set.

"You are a fool!" he gritted. "When you see your lover in his death agony you will accuse yourself alone, and——"

"Stop!"

Her voice rang out hard and sharp. Her sword leaped from its scabbard, and she held it in the air.

"You infamous wretch," she cried, "I know that this is a conspiracy of yours, and I swear that if harm comes to Chet Winton through this cowardly plot of yours, I will myself hunt you down and kill you in vengeance of his fate!"

Ormsby shrank back instinctively. He was a coward at heart. He knew the temper of the young Southern girl before him too well to go further.

"Oh, well!" and he snapped his fingers, "do as you please. I have offered you a fair chance. It is your fault if Chet Winton dies, that is all."

He turned upon his heel and strode away. For some moments Virginia May stood silent in that spot. Slowly she sheathed her sword.

Then she betrayed true womanliness. She reeled forward and leaned against the tree. Will knew that she was giving way to anguish of spirit.

He did not approach her. He went silently back the way he came.

But his heart was filled with bitter sentiments toward Ormsby, whom he now believed to be responsible for all.

It filled him with the impulse to try and secure the necessary evidence to prove it. But how could it be done?

Had he not seen Winton with his own eyes compromising and plotting with the Union officers in the swamp? As for the letter found by Ormsby, it was easy to assume that it might be a forgery. But the other matter—he rubbed his chin reflectively.

He recalled the visit of the scout, Floyd, to his camp, and his story. Now it seemed odd to Will, even as it had at the time, that Floyd should have come to him for aid to trap the traitor and not carry the tale to General Longstreet.

"Was there a motive for this?" asked the young captain.

"If so, what was it?"

For some while Will puzzled over the matter. But he could find no solution.

He had strolled deep into the encampment. The scene was one of much interest.

The Confederate soldiers were practically to sleep on their arms that night. They were close upon the heels of the Union army.

It was, therefore, necessary to be wholly upon their guard. With the morrow there would begin again the same weary round of skirmish and bush fight and pitched battle.

The privates were lying about at their ease, but the officers were hurrying about excitedly, getting their orders and making ready their plans.

Will passed through various parts of the encampment. Finally he turned his footsteps back to his own quarters.

As he did so he passed the guard tent, where, as he knew, Winton, with others, were under guard.

Winton had not been shot at sunset, as at first ordered by General Lee. A trial had been accorded him.

Will well knew that this was out of respect for his fair fiancée, and also the high social standing of the prisoner himself.

Two sentinels paced up and down before the tent. The flap was drawn back, and Will saw Winton sitting on an army chest.

With an impulse, the young captain saluted the guard and passed into the tent.

He held out his hand.

"Winton," he said, sincerely, "I am sorry for you. I, for one, don't believe you guilty."

Winton gave a start and his face clouded. He replied, coldly:

"What does that mean? It is by your evidence I will be convicted."

Will passed a hand across his brow.

"What does it mean, Chet? I certainly saw you in the swamp with those two Union officers!"

"Was it by daylight?"

"No, by the light of a lantern."

"Then your eyesight deceived you. I was not there."

"Yet my hearing is acute, and I heard them call you by name. You answered and held converse with them."

Winton looked penetratingly at Will.

"It is hard for me to believe you in league with Ormsby," he said, "and yet it seems to be true."

"I am not," declared Will, hotly. "I regard him as a scoundrel!"

"I can in no other way explain why you so persistently swear that you saw and heard me in that place where I was not."

Will looked steadily at Winton.

"Let us be reasonable," he said. "How could there be a mistake? Ormsby has declared to Miss May that if she will marry him he will prove you innocent."

Winton gave a hoarse cry. His voice was husky and his eyes glassy as he cried:

"And what did she say?"

"She refused him."

"Heaven be praised! I will gladly die to save her from his clutches. I am the victim of a fiend's work, Prentiss. You say you saw me in the swamp. You did not see me. It was some game of his. It was my double. Somebody impersonated me. I was not there!"

Winton spoke with profound earnestness. There seemed to be absolute truth in his manner.

"Your double!" said Will, vaguely. "That would bring Floyd into the plot. I have no reason to believe that he is concerned in it or that he is a tool of Ormsby's. And yet it is possible. Winton, if I could only prove that——"

"You can!"

"How?"

"Refuse to positively swear that it was me. Understand, I am not begging for my life, but I would rather give it up on the battlefield. It lies with you whether I am convicted or not."

Will Prentiss saw the whole force of this. For a moment he was tempted to make the promise.

Then he remembered that it was absolutely necessary for him to be straightforward.

"Winton," he said, "I must tell my story just as it is. Until I know for a fact that it was not you I saw in the swamp, I must believe that it was."

Winton nodded slowly.

"Very well, Prentiss," he said. "You may be right. I might do the same thing myself."

Will left the prisoner's tent. He went back to his own quarters. It was now nearing the hour of the trial.

He knew that the ordeal was going to be a hard one. He did not like to go there and testify against a fellow soldier and perhaps swear his life away.

Yet he felt positive that it was Winton whom he saw in the swamp. It was his figure, his walk, his voice and his face—what he could see that was not shaded by the wide hat.

Fred Randolph came up hurriedly:

"It is getting near time for the trial, captain. General Lee has come!"

"Then I will make ready to go," said Will. "Fred, this is the hardest thing I ever did in my life."

"Do you think there could have been a mistake? You know——"

"Yes, I know. But I am not the only one to testify. Floyd the scout can give further evidence than I. He will testify that Winton was discussed in the Union camp in his hearing. I am sorry for Winton, but—I am powerless."

"It is a sad case."

"Yes."

"I feel especially sorry for the brave girl who believes in him."

"So do I."

Will made his preparations. He dressed himself in full uniform, with sword and cap.

For a courtmartial is a ceremonious affair. Every officer must appear at his best.

A few moments later the boy captain left his quarters and walked over to General Longstreet's tent. He was admitted by an orderly.

CHAPTER XI.

THE COURTMARTIAL.

About the general's tent was a heavy guard of sentinels. No one was permitted to enter save those connected with the trial.

As Will entered he saw that General Lee and a number of his staff were present. General Lee was the presiding officer.

In a drumhead courtmartial the military court is called to order at all times by tapping the drum. The court constitutes the jury and the prosecution all in one.

Questions are asked by the officers composing the court and defence is made wholly by the prisoner or some champion selected by him.

The case therefore is thoroughly discussed and threshed out. Evidence is considered and conclusions finally reached by a majority of the court in sitting. The simplest form of a court of inquiry is therefore the form used.

Rulings are made by the superior officer, who, in this case, was General Lee. There may be other methods of conducting a courtmartial in camp, and doubtless such have been used. But this was the method employed in the present case, as described above.

The prisoner soon appeared. He was placed between two armed guards before the line of officers. The witnesses consisted of Floyd, the scout, and Captain Prentiss of the Virginia Grays, and Colonel Ormsby. There were present several minor witnesses, and quietly in one corner sat Virginia May.

The court was opened in a solemn manner by General Lee. In a brief address he recapitulated the charge against the prisoner, and the enormity of the offense. Then the first witness was called.

This was Floyd the scout.

He was questioned by General Longstreet, who, after compelling him to again show his papers signed by President Davis, finally asked:

"How did you learn that the prisoner, Lieutenant Winton, was pledged to meet two Union officers in White Oak swamp?"

Floyd answered, readily:

"I overheard ther conversation in ther Union camp ther day before. I heerd some officers talkin' about it."

"Ah! Then you took note of all that was said, did you?"

"I did, sir."

"What did you do?"

"I slid out past their picket and came back to our own lines. I was goin' to take ther story to General Longstreet, but I reckoned he'd be too busy ter give it his personal attention. I knew thet Captain Prentiss was a fighter, and I allowed he'd pick up ther case. In course, I warn't altogether sure. But it turned out jest as I said."

The story of Floyd was told in an easy, plausible way. It seemed to have due effect upon the court.

Various questions were asked him, all of which he answered satisfactorily. Then General Lee said:

"Floyd, you are excused. Captain Prentiss may take the stand."

Will was questioned closely. He told of Floyd's visit and of his story. He also repeated the conversation used by Winton in talking with the Union officers. There was a hush in the tent.

"In your opinion," said General Lee, in a hard tone, "the Confederate officer you saw was identical with the prisoner?"

"He answered to the name of Winton. He looked like him—but—" Will came to a dead stop. He looked about him in a distressed way.

Everybody looked astonished. General Lee bent forward, and said:

"Come, Prentiss, finish your statement. You say he looked like Winton, he had his voice, manner and ways. But—what?"

"I don't believe it was Winton," cried the boy captain, in tones that were filled with conviction. "I don't believe it could have been him. I don't know why I have this feeling—but I tell you truthfully I believe the prisoner has been made the victim of a plot."

There was a sensation in the tent. The prisoner was eagerly nervous, and his eyes burned with a deep light. Ormsby was cold and sneering.

Every one of the officers composing the military court seemed impressed. Virginia May had half risen from her seat, and it was evident that she with difficulty restrained herself.

"Prentiss," said General Lee, in even tones, "your statement is very surprising. It is also important. It implies a doubt of the prisoner's guilt. If it was not Winton in the swamp, who was it?"

Will shook his head.

"I don't know!"

"Have you no theory?"

"None whatever."

"Then you have no evidence to offer?"

"Wait! You might call it evidence, to me it is such. To you it may seem a straw, but I overheard a conversation this evening between two people which convinced me that there was more in this matter than appeared on the surface."

With this Will related word for word the declaration of Ormsby to Virginia May, that he would furnish evidence to clear Winton if she would marry him. The story electrified the hearers.

Ormsby's face became contorted with fury. He started up hotly.

"It is a lie!" he cried. "He cannot prove it——"

"Yes, he can!" All eyes were turned upon the fair speaker. Virginia May came forward like a queen. Her manner carried conviction as she cried:

"Gentlemen of this court, every word spoken by Captain Prentiss is true! Colonel Ormsby told me that he could furnish the evidence to clear this innocent man of this awful charge. I ask you to inquire of him how he got that information or evidence."

Every eye was upon Ormsby. He was livid with fear and fury. He trembled like an aspen.

"Ye can't throw it onto me," he hissed. "I didn't do it! The guilty man is over there! He is the traitor!"

General Lee tapped on the drum for order. The members of the court held a low-toned conversation.

Finally one of the officers looked at Ormsby, and inquired:

"Were you sincere when you made that assertion to the young lady?"

"I never made it!" denied the villain, with flaming face. "It is an invention of hers. I asked her to marry me and said I would do all I could to help the prisoner. That was all. I can give no evidence to clear him, for he is guilty."

Floyd was recalled and closely questioned. This ended the hearing of witnesses. The prisoner now recited his own story.

He told of his whereabouts at the hour named. It happened, unfortunately, that he was near the swamp. On the whole his testimony did not help him.

"It is now incumbent upon the members of this court," said General Lee, "to withdraw for a conference and weigh carefully all the evidence so as to give as just a verdict as possible. A conclusion will be arrived at then."

So the members of the court retired behind a curtain. It was a long wait before they returned.

General Lee then directed a few remarks to the prisoner and to the witnesses. He then said:

"We have carefully sifted the evidence. We find that it preponderates strongly against the prisoner. The charge

is one of the most serious that can be preferred. But, on the other hand, there are peculiar circumstances which imply a doubt. In view of this fact a suspension of the usual sentence of death is ordered, and the prisoner will be sent to Richmond to remain in custody until a higher tribunal can sit upon his case. We do this to avoid the catastrophe of executing a man about whose guilt there is a semblance of doubt."

Will drew a deep breath of relief. The prisoner started up eagerly. Virginia May gave a little cry of joy and relief.

But Ormsby, black and furious, stood fiercely regarding the court.

"This is infamous," he hissed. "There is no justice here. You give him a chance, this traitor. He will get pardon yet, and he deserves to be hung."

Ormsby turned on his heel and went out. He was plainly in a towering frame of mind.

But the great courtmartial was over. The prisoner, after being permitted to hold a brief converse with the girl he loved, was led away.

Will went back to his quarters. He was ready to turn in and sleep. But this was not to be.

"Well, how did it come out, Will?" asked Fred Randolph.

"I think the ruling of General Lee and the decision of the military court was the most fairminded proceeding I ever heard of. The prisoner was given a chance."

"That is not a common thing in the military service."

"Very true! Many a poor fellow is shot without a fair show. It requires a broad interpretation of the law and of justice to rule a court of justice."

The Grays were resting after their hard day's fighting. They knew the morrow was likely to usher in a big battle.

Will had prepared to sleep, when an orderly appeared at his tent door. He saluted, and handed Will a letter. The boy captain broke the seal and read that which gave him a start.

"My Dear Prentiss:—Immediately after leaving the courtmartial I met President Davis, who has just come up from Richmond to oversee to-morrow's battle. I have told him Winton's story, and he is very much interested. I wish you would find Floyd the scout and bring him at once to my tent. The President wishes to interview him.

"Signed: ROBERT E. LEE."

Will at once turned to the orderly.

"Report to General Lee that his orders will be at once obeyed," he said. Then he left his tent and went in quest of Floyd.

It required some time for him to find the scout. He

passed through the various company streets, and finally found him in a tent of Ormsby's company playing cards.

Floyd came out of the tent and joined Will. The young captain at once stated his business.

Floyd's face flushed, and he said:

"Ye say President Davis wants to see me, eh?"

"Yes."

"Wal, I'll report to General Lee in half an hour."

"I need hardly impress upon you the necessity of at once reporting," said Will, sternly. "The President waits on no man."

"All right," said Floyd, "I will report as soon as I can."

The impulse was upon the boy captain to demand that Floyd accompany him. He was genuinely sorry afterwards that he did not insist upon it, even to the point of placing him under arrest.

But he did not, and, hurrying away, presented himself at General Lee's tent.

As he entered he saw the President sitting at a table in earnest conference with the general. It was some moments before either turned about.

Then General Lee's face lit up.

"Ah! President Davis, here is the young captain now!"

President Davis turned and held out his hand in a genial way.

"How are you, Prentiss?" he said, cordially. "I am glad to see you. I have word from your father, who is in Richmond. He is well and sends his regards."

"I thank you, President Davis," replied Will, respectfully. "I am glad to hear from my father."

"He is proud of his son, and he certainly has reason to be. Oh, you needn't blush, my boy, everybody knows the good work you and your Virginia Grays have done."

"You give us too much credit," replied the young captain, "but the Grays are determined to do their duty."

"I believe you. Now let us talk over this matter of which you were speaking, Lee. What about young Winton's case?"

"I think I have given you all the details," replied General Lee. "It is possible that Floyd the scout can furnish more."

"Yes," agreed the President, "but he does not seem to be on hand."

"He will report very soon," said Will. "I saw him but a few moments ago."

General Lee gave a start.

"Why did he not accompany you?" he asked, sharply.

"He was not ready. At least——" Will paused in dismay. "Have I done wrong?"

"Yes!" replied Lee, curtly. "You were directed to bring him here, even under arrest, if necessary!"

"Dear me," exclaimed President Davis, with concern, "the fellow won't show up, be sure of it, Lee!"

"Orderly," called the general, sharply. An orderly appeared.

"Send out word at once to arrest the scout on sight. Let every picket be posted to hold him up if he attempts to leave the lines. Take a mounted provost guard and find him. Bring him here at once!"

The general's orders rang out sharp and stern. The orderly vanished.

For a moment Will was aghast. His face showed chagrin.

"I can only say that I did not think the matter so serious," he said.

"It is serious, I assure you," said Lee. "But I am primarily at fault. In my orders to you I was not strong enough in regard to his arrest. That is what I should have ordered."

"All this is incomprehensible to me," said Will.

"Of course," said Davis. "The captain is not to blame, Lee. I'll tell you about it, Prentiss. When Lee explained to me about this man Floyd and that he held a commission as scout signed by me, I at once knew there was something wrong."

"Something wrong?" gasped Will.

"Yes, for I never signed a scout's commission in my life. That is done by the Secretary of War. His commission is a clumsy forgery, which proves that he is——"

"An impostor."

"And doubtless a Union spy."

Will's head reeled. He saw it all now, and he lamented his own stupidity in not having seen it before. It was Floyd's commission that had deceived him.

Any article signed by Jefferson Davis had seemed to him a sufficient guarantee of the possessor's loyalty. He had never suspected Floyd.

"So you see," said Davis, quietly, "it is quite necessary to get this man Floyd."

"I should say so," cried Will. "I must say he greatly deceived me."

"You say he came to you and induced you to go into the swamp to overhear a plot between a traitor and two Union officers, and that this traitor was Winton?"

"Yes," replied Will.

"Well, the whole game is plain enough. Some one who is of Winton's build masqueraded, and you were simply led into the plot as a witness to secure his conviction. We have figured it all out, haven't we, Lee?"

"Yes—I think we have," replied the general.

"Now," resumed Davis, "if we can get hold of Floyd we will wring a confession from him. It will, no doubt,

implicate the real traitor, and when we find him"—the President's voice rose to a high key—"we will hang him so high that he won't be taken down right away. That is all."

General Lee arose and paced up and down the tent uneasily. He was a fine figure, which showed off to great advantage in his handsome uniform of gray.

President Davis returned to the table and his examination of various papers thereon. For some time he was engaged thus.

Finally he turned, and said, with a humorous twinkle in his eyes:

"I say, Lee, if we get this matter all cleared up, and we drive the Yankees to-morrow, we'll have a grand military wedding and ball, in which Mrs. Chet Winton shall honor me with the first dance."

"She shall lead the cotillion with me," cried General Lee, with a jolly laugh. "I am deeply impressed with the lady, and if she will accept I shall offer her a position on my staff."

"She'll accept," cried the President. "You never saw a woman refuse anything yet."

"Oh, yes, I have!"

"What?"

"A man not to her tastes. Certainly Ormsby got the mitten in good shape!"

And the two great leaders laughed heartily. Will was amused also, but modesty and tact kept him in the background.

"Well," said the President, finally, with a yawn, "is it not about time to hear from our messengers?"

"I should say it was," replied Lee. "Ah! What is this?"

The tramp of feet sounded without, and into the tent marched a guard of five men.

In their midst, with arms shackled, was Floyd the scout. His clothes were torn, and his face smeared with blood.

"We got him, general," said the corporal, with a salute. "It was a tough fight he put up. He shot two of our boys and ran the picket guard, but we caught him."

General Lee's face was stern and cold. He gazed at Floyd in a penetrating way.

"You admit your guilt?"

"I ain't the really guilty one."

"Oh, you are not, eh? It is your game to throw your guilt upon some one else."

"No!" cried Floyd, forcibly. "If it was my game I'd stand by it. But it ain't. He got me into it. I ain't no traitor nor no spy. He paid me to fool this young captain, and I did it."

Floyd pointed to Will. General Lee nodded, and said:

"Of whom are you speaking? Whose tool are you?"

"I am speakin' of Ormsby!"

General Lee turned and glanced at Davis. The latter nodded slowly.

"Where did you get your scout's credentials, purporting to be signed by me?" asked the President.

"He gave them to me."

"Ormsby?"

"Yas."

"Then you confess that the charge against Winton was manufactured, and that he is wholly innocent?"

"I do."

"Floyd," said Davis, arising, "I don't believe you are half bad. I think you have been in bad hands. You are a Virginian, are you not?"

"I am, Mr. President!"

"Well, it is not like a true Virginian to play such a treacherous game. You deserve severe punishment, for you have done wrong. But the real guilty one shall hang for this. You must make full confession, and I will consider your case later."

This unexpected clemency had a powerful effect upon the scout. His frame shook with emotion.

But General Lee had sent the guard to secure the arrest of Ormsby. His coming was now awaited.

It was not long before the guard returned with a startling report.

"Colonel Ormsby left the lines an hour ago," he said. "He cannot be found. He rode away toward the Union lines."

"Too late!" exclaimed President Davis, with clouded brow. "We have been fooled, Lee!"

General Lee shrugged his shoulders.

"He has beaten us," he said, "but we will get him yet."

He called an orderly and directed that mounted parties should be sent out on all the roads toward Richmond, and also toward the Union lines.

"He will not enter the Union camp," he said. "He has too many interests in the South. I fancy he will hide in some out-of-the-way place until after the war is over, or perhaps go to some foreign country."

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH ALL ENDS WELL.

"Ah," he said coldly, "you did not see fit to obey my order to come here and meet the President?"

"It's all up," said the scout, doggedly. "I'll ax ye to shoot me, an' not give me ther rope! I'm ready ter go now."

At this Floyd suddenly started forward. His manner was eager.

"General Lee," he cried, "I'm goin' ter make a full breast of it. I know whar Ormsby has gone an' what his game is."

All eyes were turned upon the scout.

President Davis showed interest.

"Speak up, my man," he said, "let us have your story."

Floyd at once began:

"Arter I saw the captain hyar and he gave me orders to report to General Lee here, I went at once and gave ther alarm to Ormsby.

"He knew that it meant fer us both to git out. He got the start of me and so didn't get caught. Now I'll tell ye whar he has gone.

"Out hyar on a leetle creek thet runs into the Chickahominy is the farm-house of Bill Dady. Now Bill used to be butler for the family of the Mays in Petersburg, and his wife was the woman who nursed Virginia when she was a baby. In course the gal is fond of her old nurse.

"Ormsby knew it, and he has laid a trap to capture Virginia outside the lines. A messenger, pretending to be from Mrs. Dady, brought word to Virginia, asking her to come to her bedside at once, as she was dying.

"Of course the young gal mounted her horse an' started. That was two hours ago. She's thar long since, an' as Ormsby had a mounted guard thar to capture her, she's already a prisoner. It's Ormsby's game to take her back into the mountains and keep her a prisoner until she agrees to marry him. Thet's the hull story."

It is hardly necessary to say that this story of Floyd's created a sensation in the tent.

President Davis, for the first time, showed temper. His eyes flashed, and his voice rang out sharply:

"Turn out a heavy guard! Patrol every road leading north and west. Catch this scoundrel if it takes every man in this army to do it!"

General Lee turned to Will Prentiss, and said:

"Prentiss, your men are mounted. This is a mission for you. See that you catch Ormsby and rescue that young woman. Report to me later."

Will saluted, and then dashed from the tent.

He needed no great incentive. With quick step he reached his own tent. Fred Randolph met him.

"Fred," he said, "call out the whole company. Mount them and report at the earliest moment."

"What's wrong, Will?"

Briefly Will told the story. Fred at once exclaimed:

"By Jove, that is enough! We will get him!"

The alarm went up, and in less time than it takes to tell

it the Grays were out of their blankets and buckling on their carbines and swords. Their muskets, with bayonets, which they used as infantry, were left stacked in front of the camp.

The horses were quickly saddled, and the little company mounted.

Will had procured his own horse and was ready. As the little column swung along the line, he gave the word:

"Forward, Grays! Quick trot!"

Down the lines of campfires dashed the little mounted troop. They were soon beyond the picket line.

Will knew, from the information given him, about where Dady's farm was. It would not be difficult to find it, he felt sure.

Into the night they galloped.

Will rode in advance, and as the miles sped by he became suddenly conscious of a peculiar fact.

The distant, luminous glow in the northern sky showed where the Union army was encamped.

He was riding dangerously close to their line. At any moment the Grays might ride into an ambush.

But Will Prentiss was under orders. It was not his purpose to turn back. He must push on.

And on went the Grays. Up hill and down, through glades and across dells, fording little streams and crossing tracts of swamps.

He knew now that he was near the Chickahominy and not far from Dady's farm.

As the Grays rode on, suddenly a startling sight burst upon their view. Visible above the tree-tops and not half a mile ahead there shot up a column of flame and smoke.

Will instantly drew rein.

"What do you make of it, captain?" cried Fred Randolph. "It can't be a Union campfire?"

Will experienced a chill.

"No," he said, "it is a burning building. Probably it is Dady's house!"

"Do you believe it?"

"What else can it be?"

"Would Ormsby be apt to fire Dady's house? He would have no spite against him!"

"He may have done it to blind pursuit. Forward! Double-quick!"

The Grays urged their horses on. Through the little patch of woods they rode, and now burst upon the scene of destruction, which was comprehensive enough.

Dady's home was fast becoming a heap of ashes. But another spectacle gave Will a thrill.

He saw, not Ormsby and his men about the burning pile, but a large company of men in blue. They had the appearance of Union cavalry.

Will drew rein, for he was too prudent to rush into a trap.

"What the deuce is that?" cried Fred. "It looks like Union cavalry!"

"It is not Ormsby!"

"No!"

"I have it!"

"What?"

"They are Union raiders or guerrillas. See! Who is that bound to a horse in their midst? Do you see?"

"My soul! It is a young woman. It is Virginia May!"

This was plainly true. The young Confederate female lieutenant, with her cap missing, and her wealth of dark hair falling over her shoulders, sat pale and rigid among her captors.

And that they were a brutish lot was evidenced by their drunken actions. Some of them were dancing like wild Indians about the fire.

Fred Randolph drew his sword.

"What do you say, Will?" he asked. "Shall we charge them?"

"They greatly outnumber us!"

"But I think we can scatter them with a swift attack."

"All right!" agreed the young captain. "Ready, Grays! Draw sabres! Forward! Quick trot! Charge!"

Like a whirlwind the Grays went sweeping down upon the guerrillas. They saw them coming, and a mad yell went up.

The officer in command gave the word to retreat. Those who were not mounted did not succeed, however, in doing this. They were cut down by the Grays.

The others dashed away up a steep ascent. At the summit they paused and, turning, sent a hot volley down upon their pursuers.

Several of the Grays went down. Will saw that it would mean annihilation to try to carry the height.

So he gave the order to fall back. The Grays withdrew to the shelter of a little ridge to the right of the position of the foe.

This caused the guerrillas to slightly shift their front. Then a line of fire leaped from their ranks.

The Grays answered, and soon a hot battle was in progress. Will sent the horses to the rear, and then the Grays went forward on foot.

They crept onward cautiously and soon had the gratification of knowing that they were driving the foe.

The Union raiders were falling back. In the gloom it was difficult to tell, though, if this was a real retreat or simply a change of position.

But soon Will became assured that the Union line was drawing back before the hot fire of the Grays.

He was satisfied that the right time had come for action. He leaped out in front of his men and cried:

"Up, Grays, and at them! Charge!"

With a rousing cheer the brave little company responded. With a rush they went over the ridge.

They saw the line of raiders melting away in the gloom. Volley after volley followed them.

The Grays gave them no chance to mount and escape. They were down upon them and scattered them, capturing half a hundred horses.

The guerrillas were now so scattered that no organized resistance by them was possible. So Will began to call his men back.

In orderly fashion they fell back. Besides the horses they had captured Will was overjoyed to find that the fair girl prisoner, Virginia May, was rescued.

Her bonds were cut, and it is hardly necessary to say that she was much overjoyed. As Will greeted her, she cried:

"But I do not understand how you learned my trouble. When I left the camp none knew where I was going."

"Yes, Miss May," replied Will, "one very great scoundrel knew it, and it was a part of his villainous scheme that brought you here."

Virginia gave a great start.

"Then it is not true that my nurse was dying and had sent for me?"

"It was a base fabrication. The plot of the villain was to entrap you here and——"

"I see the whole game," cried Virginia, with sudden comprehension. "When I arrived here the house was dark. I was greatly surprised to find nobody about the place. While I was wondering if I had come to the wrong place Colonel Ormsby and a dozen men surrounded me and tied me to my horse."

"It was the plot," cried Will. "You were to be taken to the mountains. But tell me, what became of Ormsby?"

"I do not know. While they were binding me we were surrounded and attacked by these Union guerrillas. I lost sight of Ormsby. Some of his men were killed. The guerrillas then set fire to the house."

All seemed plain now.

To Will it seemed quite probable that Ormsby had made his escape. To attempt to recapture him now would be like looking for a needle in a haystack.

"Miss May," said Will, "I have pleasant news for you."

"What?" she asked, eagerly.

"Lieutenant Winton is proven innocent."

She reeled in her saddle. Clutching at the pommel, she leaned forward, and in a husky voice asked:

"You are not deceiving me?"

"No," replied the young captain, "I am telling you the absolute truth."

"Heaven be praised!" For some time she was silent. Then she asked again:

"How did the truth come out?"

"Through the forged credentials of the scout, Floyd. He was taken before President Davis and made a full confession."

"God is good!" she murmured. "I knew it would come out in the end. Shall we go back, Captain Prentiss?"

"Yes," replied Will. But just then Fred Randolph came striding up. He saluted, and said:

"Captain, we have been burying the dead. Among them we have found a man with a colonel's shoulder straps. Perhaps you know him?"

Will and Virginia now went forward and gazed upon the face of the dead man. The young captain drew a deep breath. Virginia May shut her lips tightly.

"I wished him no harm in life," she said. "In death I forgive him."

In a shallow grave Ormsby's body was laid. It may be there now, for aught anyone knows.

The Grays galloped leisurely back to the Confederate camp. Will and Virginia went at once to General Lee's tent.

In spite of the lateness of the hour he was still there, conferring with President Davis. But as they entered it was seen that another was present.

Lieutenant Chet Winton, with a wild, glad cry, sprang up from his chair:

"Virginia! My Virginia!"

The lovers were clasped in each other's arms. Will and Fred removed their caps and bent their heads down.

General Lee turned his head away and President Davis coughed slightly. It was an affecting moment.

But after rain comes sunshine. A moment later the blushing young maiden was bowing and curtsying to General Lee and the President.

"I think we'll have that wedding after all, Lee," said Davis, facetiously.

"The first cotillion with the bride," said General Lee.

"The first waltz is mine," said the President. Virginia blushed in pretty confusion.

"With all my happiness you must shower honors upon me," she cried.

And in spite of the grim and ominous outlook for the morrow there was genuine happiness and human joy in General Lee's tent two hours past the midnight of June 28 and 29, in that memorable year of 1862.

When daybreak came the great army of the Confederacy was hotly crowding upon the rear of the retreating Army of the Potomac.

Magruder moved up along the Williamsburg road to find the works at Fair Oaks abandoned.

The enemy had fallen back to Savage's Station, and he proceeded to attack them there.

History records the events of that awful day, the 29th of June. It was a continuous skirmish and battle along a line fully ten miles in extent.

The Confederates massed their forces repeatedly to pierce the Union line. If they had once succeeded the fate of the great Union army would have been settled.

How they made the attempt and what was the result of the fourth day's battle, as well as what part the Virginia Grays took in it, we will leave to another story to tell.

Floyd the scout died in imprisonment. We have seen the fate of Ormsby and the happy vindication of Chet Winton.

It is enough to say that he served with credit to the end of the war, when he married sweet Virginia May, and their progeny are now at this day among the rising generation of the good old Dominion of Virginia.

THE END.

Read "BETWEEN TWO FIRES; OR, THE BOYS IN BLUE CUT OFF," which will be the next number (17) of "Blue and Gray Weekly."

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